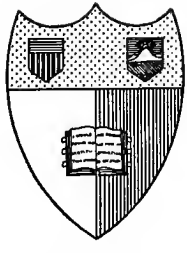
THE MINUTE BOYS OF LONG ISLAND

JAMES OTIS



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THE MINUTE BOYS OF LONG ISLAND

"LUTHER HAD A HOOK WHICH HE WAS USING AS A PIKE."

THE MINUTE BOYS OF LONG ISLAND

A STORY OF NEW YORK IN 1776

AS TOLD BY

EPHRAIM LYTTLE

JAMES OTIS

Illustrated

By L. J. BRIDGMAN

BOSTON

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THE

MINUTE BOYS OF LONG ISLAND

CHAPTER I.

"WE THREE."

WHEN you come to think it over seriously, it really seems that Abel Grant could not be blamed for laughing and saying that we were "outgrowing our clothes," in selecting the name of Minute Boys of Long Island for three lads — Abraham Decker, Samuel Garratt and myself, neither of whom had yet passed his fifteenth year; but how else could it be shown that we were heart and soul with the Cause, or that we burned to have a hand in upsetting the king's authority in this land which our fathers have wrested from the savages and the wilderness.

It was when the base plot of Governor Tryon's was unmasked that we decided it was time for us to show the Tories of Long Island, who out-numbered the loyal men eight to one, that there were some who would lay down their lives, if needs be, for freedom from British misrule.

We three lived within half a gunshot of each other on the shore of Wallabout bay, and owned, because of having built her from keel to mast-

head, the sloop Swiftsure, in which we often sailed to New York when our fathers failed in finding work to occupy our time at home.

When the first inkling of Tryon's plot was made known, even the Tories of the island were eager to hear what might be going on, and the consequence was that not a man remained at home, because of the great excitement, therefore were we three at liberty to do very nearly as we pleased, so that we did not disregard any rules of the household previously laid down.

At Israel Dyker's dock, on the New York side, we were allowed to moor our sloop whenever we pleased, and Master Dyker's son Jethro, who cared for his father's boats, was ever willing to keep a watchful eye over ours. Therefore it was we three lads could go and come much as we pleased, save, which needs not the saying, when we had work at home to occupy our time. In ordinary seasons boys on a farm would have but few idle hours at their disposal; but at this particular season little was thought or talked of except the attempt to throw aside the yoke which the king had made heavier and heavier each day, until our people would have been worse than curs had they submitted tamely to the injustice and oppression.

Even the lads talked politics in those days, and we knew full well what was being done in behalf of the colonies, even as we did the many devices of our enemies to grind us yet further into the dust.

The Cause had but few friends on Long Island in that year of 1776, and perhaps we who favored it were bound more closely together by the knowledge that among our neighbors the Tories outnumbered us at least eight to one. Therefore it

was that when information of the dastardly plot against Washington and some of the other generals began to leak out, we — meaning boys as well as men who were for independence — were not a little concerned regarding our own safety. It was known full well that Governor Tryon himself was at the head of the cowardly movement, and if he could find people willing to strike a blow against the leaders of our movement, what might we not expect from our Tory neighbors who had private scores to settle with many of us?

Thus it can be seen that when we three lads bound ourselves together by solemn oaths to stand up against any who might try to lay hands on either of us, it was by no means a childish game we were playing at. Even Abel Grant admitted that we were wise in organizing for our own defense; but he took it upon himself to laugh at the high-sounding name we gave to our federation.

"It may chance we shall find others who will be glad to join the Minute Boys of Long Island, and if we could get together no more than twelve, let me tell you, Abel Grant, it would be within our power to do considerable for the Cause. A round dozen of boys, from fourteen to sixteen years of age, could come near, under certain circumstances, to doing the work of as many men, more particularly if the war should be brought here on our own island."

I spoke hotly, and Abel, seeing that he had rubbed us a trifle harder than was friendly, made haste to say:

"I grant you, Ephraim, that even no more than three lads, with such a sloop as you own, could do very much at certain times, an' I am not be-

littlin' the general idee. Of course there's no chance we shall see anything of war here on the island; but yet —"

"And why not?" Abraham interrupted quickly. "My father says the Britishers will soon come to drive the Colonial forces out of New York, an' when that is done this island of ours is the very likeliest place on which to make a landin'."

"I won't attempt to set up my opinion against your father's, Abe; but at the same time I've got the right, or shall have when the Congress declares us free an' independent, to believe whatsoever I please. Jest now, however, there's scant reason why we should spend overly much time tryin' to figger what the Britishers will do next month or next year, 'cause things are gettin' a mite hot on the New York side. Master Goodhue came over from market this mornin', an' says the plot of Tryon's is common news. One of General Washington's own guardsmen has been arrested, an' Master Forbes, the gunsmith, is in prison. Why not take a run over this afternoon, an' give me a passage?"

There was no need for Abel to spend very much breath in favor of either proposition. The news that arrests had already been made fired us as nothing else could have done, and, without waiting to learn whether one or all of us might be needed at home, we set about making ready for the voyage, the conversation I have set down being carried on at the head of the cove where the Swiftsure was anchored.

In a twinkling, so excited were we by the news Abel gave us, the sloop was under way, and our

passenger began repeating all he had heard from Master Goodhue.

He was a long while in the telling, as if thereby he might pay the better price for his passage; but, boiled down into a reasonably short story, and added to what we already knew, the facts in the matter were much like this:

In some way, I can't say how, General Washington had discovered that Governor Tryon, Mayor Mathews, Gilbert Forbes, the gunsmith whose shop is on the Broadway, and perhaps a dozen other Tories, had in hand a plot to seize Washington as prisoner and deliver him over to Sir William Howe. In order to do this, or to aid in capturing the officers of the Colonial army, the magazine was to be blown up, and every road leading from the city taken possession of by the Tories, who had already enlisted more than five hundred curs vile enough to take up arms for that king who had treated them more like cattle than human beings.

Two of General Washington's bodyguard, together with about a dozen citizens, had been arrested that morning. All save the two traitorous soldiers had been sent to a prison in Connecticut, where there was little fear the Britishers could do anything toward effecting their release, and the members of the guard who had sold their honor for the king's gold, were to be tried by a military court that very day.

Who can wonder, in the face of such news, that we found the city fairly boiling with excitement when we landed from the sloop, after making her fast at Master Dyker's dock?

As a matter of course, we went directly to Bowl-

ing Green, knowing that there would be found all the idle gossipers of the city, and it was as if some great revel was going on, so many people had gathered. We were not long in learning that Master Goodhue had told us no more than the truth; but what seemed yet worse, we heard many of the throng speaking as if they were saddened because the plot had been discovered.

"I had not believed there were so many Tories in New York," Sam whispered to me as we stood near a group of five who were speculating upon the possibility of lending some aid to those who were accused. "We have got used to hearin' them on the island, for it is there we raise that kind of cattle; but here I supposed the greater portion of the citizens were real men," and Abe added:

"I fail of understandin' how a man with any degree of respect for himself, can take sides with the king against his own countrymen."

"There's more than that in this world you can't understand, Abe Decker," was said in a mocking voice just behind me, and I turned to see Luther Stedman, the son of that Tory Stedman who lives on the island near the ferry, a lad whom I had counted as a friend until learning that he, like his father, believed the king to be more of a god than a man.

"Perhaps my head ain't any thicker than yours," Abe replied quickly and hotly, "an' then again, perhaps I've been brought up to have less love for curs that are ready, for the sake of a fat bone, to bite those who have been friends."

By this Abe meant to hit Luther on the fact that his father had been trying for no one knows how long, to get the appointment of officer of the cus-

toms, and only lately, when the king was no longer able to collect duties in New York, had he received any encouragement.

It goes without saying that Luther took fire in an instant, and but for Sam, who stepped between them, the two lads might have come to blows then and there, even though the watch would have made them prisoners in a twinkling.

Quickly though Sam moved, mischief was worked, for Abe's anger was too hot to permit of guarding his tongue, and he foolishly made threats as to what should be done if Luther's father continued to toady to the king's officers as he had been doing. Of course I do not count it a mischief for a fellow to stand up boldly for the Cause; but when he lives in a neighborhood where eight out of every nine are Tories, then is it foolish for him to make threats, since it only serves to call particular attention to himself and his friends.

"We'll clip your wings a bit, before this thing is settled," Luther cried in a rage. "Those who live in our section of the island are, except for a few like the Deckers, the Garratts, and the Lyttles, honest, law-abiding people who will not brook seditious talk from man or boy. You think your ragamuffin army is able to stand against the king's troops simply because they happen to be holdin' this town; but just wait until the English ships give you a call! The idea of boys like you talking about a plot, when his majesty's servants are doing what they may to put down traitors! Before we're a week older I'll show you how such as you should be treated, and that without heed to the imitation soldiers you've got here!"

"And I'll show —"

Abe had begun to reply while he was literally trembling with rage, and, fearing lest more should be said than was wise, I covered his mouth with my hand, at the same time forcing him away from the young Tory.

"Let me go!" he cried fiercely, when I gave him opportunity to speak but at the same time, with the aid of Sam and Abel Grant, continued to force him away from Luther's neighborhood. "That scoundrel shan't have the satisfaction of believing he has frightened me!"

I did not dare to hold him longer against his will, and was well nigh at my wits end to know how a street brawl might be prevented at less cost than a quarrel betwixt him and me, when Abel interrupted happily:

"A fine Minute Boy you'll make, Abraham Decker, if, for the sake of rufflin' a Tory's feathers, you let your tongue run away with you! Of how much service can you be to the Cause if you begin by puttin' it in the minds of those who are strongest, to get you out of the way, as will be done in case Luther Stedman convinces his father that it is in your power to do aught against the king?"

A bucket full of cold water could not have had more effect on a setting hen, than did these words on Abraham. On the instant his anger subsided, and in its stead must have come a feeling of shame because of his folly, if one could judge from the deep flush that overspread his face.

Nor was this the only brawl we were like to have taken part in that afternoon. On every hand words ran high; it was as if men had suddenly been enraged to a white heat, and those spoke intemper-

ately who at almost any other time would have remained silent. A self-respecting Whig could keep his tongue between his teeth only with difficulty, and many of the Tories were so wrought up by the knowledge that their deeply-laid plot had been discovered, that they gave words to thoughts which were in the highest degree dangerous while our people held possession of the town.

It yet lacked a full two hours to sunset when I proposed that we return home, for, to tell the truth, it had come to my mind that we might get into serious trouble by remaining at such a time; but Abel Grant and my comrades were so eager to learn everything they could regarding the plot, it was impossible for me, without showing myself in the highest degree selfish, to do other than consult their pleasure. I did not, however, give way without exacting a price.

"If we loiter around here where so much is being done to arouse the anger of those friendly to the Cause, there is good chance we shall find ourselves locked up on a charge of disturbing the peace," I said, laughing lest they should suspect how much of fear was in my heart. "Now if you lads will go with me on board the sloop, we'll leave Abel to pick up all the gossip, and when his budget is full he shall come to us."

Abe and Sam were unwilling to tear themselves away from the excited throng so soon; but because of what had already happened Abraham could not make very loud protest against my plan, and I soon won over the third of our newly-made Minute Boys.

We three walked slowly back to Master Dyker's dock with our ears pricked up to hear all that might

be said as we passed along, and once having arrived, heard that which was like to make our stay a long one.

"Your father has been here, Ephraim," Jethro Dyker said as we went on the dock, "an' has left word that you are to stay aboard the sloop until he an' Abe's father come again, even though they should not show themselves till the morrow."

"Then we had best go back to the Green, where is a chance to enjoy ourselves," Sam cried in delight, and Abe would have joined him in the suggestion, but that I said in a tone which showed I could not be moved to change my mind:

"It is not safe for Abraham to go among the Tories this day. He has already shown that he cannot hold his tongue at the proper time, therefore he an' I will stay aboard the sloop. Go if you will, Sam; but do not remain away very long lest our fathers should arrive in a hurry to go home."

I had hardly more than ceased speaking before Sam was off at full speed, and, grumbling not a little, Abe went into the small cabin as if to indulge in a fit of the sulks. To prevent anything of the kind I followed, copying my comrade's movements by throwing myself into the bunk opposite the one of which he had taken possession.

It may be well to say that we had outfitted the Swiftsure in such a manner as would allow us to take long cruises in her, and not only had fair arrangements for sleeping; but there was in the small cabin a tiny stove whereon we could make into chowder or a fry, the fish we caught. More than once had we lived aboard four days without inconvenience, and much to our comfort and pleasure.

At first I tried to talk with my companion about

what we had seen and heard; but he was in such a humor that I soon gave it up as a bad job, and lay stretched out at full length speculating upon the possibility of serving the Cause as Minute Boys, when there came a heavy blow which caused the sloop to rock to and fro, thus telling that some person had jumped on board from the dock.

Believing our visitor to be Jethro Dyker, I did not so much as raise my head until a second shock was felt, and I heard a strange voice ask:

"Do you know who owns this craft?"

It was Luther Stedman who replied, and you may fancy that I pricked up my ears at once, when he said:

"She belongs to a scoundrelly lot of Whigs who live near my home. They are down on Bowling Green getting what comfort is possible out of the discovery of the plot, an' are not likely to come this way until we are well off."

"The Whigs will surely make trouble for you, if it is known you had a hand in this matter, and it will be in their power to do so until the king's troops take possession of New York."

"They haven't many days left for their traitorous work, an' we must take the chances in order to help our friends. It is certain some one who had been trusted with all the secrets, has turned informer, an' no one can say how soon more arrests will follow."

"Will your father be on the look-out for us?"

"If he finds our man at the place agreed upon. It may be, however, that the mischief has already been done, an' Master Campbell is a prisoner with the others, in which case we can leave this sloop at the rendezvous an' go our way."

Here was a fine state of affairs, and he would have been a dummy who could not understand from what had already been said, the whole situation. I believed this "Master Campbell" of whom they spoke, was a ship-owner whose office was near to Peck Slip. I had often heard him spoken of as a sneaking Tory who was willing to do the Cause whatsoever of harm he might, and would not begrudge his dollars if they might aid in riveting upon us the king's chains more firmly.

There was no question in my mind but that Luther Stedman and his companion, whoever that might be, were trying to save this same Master Campbell from arrest, and because of seeing us three lads at Bowling Green apparently intent on what was going on, the Tories believed there would be no opposition to taking possession of our craft. I had brought Abraham on board in order to prevent him from getting into trouble through his tongue, and lo! had set him down in the very midst of Tory plots, where actual fighting would be necessary to save us from lending aid to our enemies.

Verily the Minute Boys of Long Island had work cut out for them before having fairly come together as an organization!

I looked across the cabin at Abe, and saw that his eyes were open wide, staring at me as if to ask what should be done, and for the moment I was puzzled to find an answer.

The Tories had already begun to get the sloop under way, as could be told by the scuffling and the dragging of ropes across the deck. It was reasonable to suppose Luther's companion was somewhere near his own size, therefore would we be about evenly matched in the fight which was so near at

hand, for, without understanding exactly how it was to be opened, I knew we two lads were in for a desperate row. It was not within the range of possibilities that the royalist sneaks, after having got thus far in the plan to save Master Campbell from arrest, would quietly give up possession of our sloop.

It was while I was turning the matter over hastily in my mind, understanding that we must set about the task in such a manner as to insure success otherwise we were in for rough handling, that Abe slipped softly out of the bunk, making no more noise than a mouse might, and was working his way across the cabin toward me. While so doing it would, perhaps, be possible for him to get a glimpse of the Tories through the narrow opening to the cuddy, and I was well content to wait until we could talk one with another, more particularly since I had not been able to hit upon any scheme for opening the battle.

Before he was by the side of my bunk the heeling of the sloop told that she was free of the dock, and the voyage, wherever it was to end, had begun with a wind sufficiently strong to give the Swiftsure a good chance to show her heels, which, as I knew full well, were more speedy than any craft of her size in New York harbor.

"Where are they headin' for?" Abe asked of me in a cautious whisper.

"Into the Hudson river, most like. Did you see the other fellow?" I asked in turn.

"Ay, an' so far as size goes he should be able to answer for both you an' me. We can't afford to stay idle many minutes, for if they find we're aboard, it will be a simple matter to shut us up in a trap with no chance for striking a blow."

"Shall we make a rush now?"

"As soon as we can find somethin' in the way of weapons. This isn't likely to be child's play, an' when we get in a blow it must count, for they will do their best to disable us, without givin' heed as to whether a life be taken or not."

Immediately we had thus spoken Abe set about searching for something that would serve him, and it can well be imagined that I followed his example without loss of time.

It was not possible to find exactly that which we wanted and at the same time move so silently as to avoid attracting the attention of those on deck; but when it seemed to me as if we had spent a dangerously long while in the search, I came upon a spare tiller — a stout oaken stick nearly thirty inches long, and Abe had wrenched off one of the stove legs. This done we crouched for an instant just inside the cuddy door, as my comrade whispered:

"Because of what was said on the Green, I claim the right to go first. Let me get but one clip at Luther, an' I'll warrant he won't have any further interest in the row. Then both of us can tackle the big fellow, an' even at that, the odds won't be much more than even."

I could not have prevented him from doing as he had said, even though I felt so disposed, for at that instant Luther Stedman's ugly face appeared at the cuddy hatch, his eyes bulging with surprise and fear at seeing us.

"You miserable Tory whelp!" Abe shouted as he sprang full at the fellow, aiming a blow which would have put Luther out of the fight for some time to come had it been delivered fairly.

Unfortunately, however, Abe stumbled ever so slightly, and the Tory so far dodged that the stove leg struck his shoulder instead of his head, where it should have landed.

The big fellow was at the helm; but he dropped the tiller in a twinkling, springing at us like a cat, and even from the passing glimpse I had, it was possible to understand that we had considerable work cut out for us if we were to get the best of the squabble.

Of what was done during the first two or three minutes, I have no very clear idea, for it was as rough and tumble a fight as I ever had a hand in. I knew, however, that we were nearly off the battery when Abe and I came out of the cabin; that the sloop was singing dangerously close inshore, and that Luther had a boat-hook which he was using as a pike. As to other details I gave no heed, having quite as much of business on hand as could well be attended to just at the time.

The big fellow had not waited to arm himself; but came into the fray empty-handed, and the first blow he struck felled me like an ox, for I received it just between the eyes. Fortunately I fell on the deck instead of into the cabin, and when I came to my senses and my feet at about the same time, Luther was lying not far away with the blood flowing from his mouth and nose, while Abe and the big fellow were rolling over and over in the cockpit, the Tory evidently having the best of it.

All the while the sloop was rolling and thumping against the battery dock as if bent on staving every timber in her hull, and the waves, for the fresh breeze had kicked up considerable of a sea, were drenching all of us in great shape. I could dimly

hear cries from the shore, as if those there were aware of what was going on but I gave no heed to them, knowing full well that Abe stood sorely in need of aid.

Although I moved as lively as ever a fellow could who was more than half dazed from the first blow, I did not get into the cockpit in time to save Abe from a wicked clip that caused him to sink back on the timbers like one dead, and then the big Tory turned his attention to me.

I had sense enough remaining to understand that my only show was to come into close action, for the fellow was my better at arm's lengths, and I grappled at once, wondering how long it would be possible to stand him off, when I heard as if from afar off the cry:

"It strikes me that the Minute Boys of Long Island are gettin' a bit more than they counted on!" and then it seemed as if Sam was standing close beside the Tory and me.

After that all was darkness, with the sensation as if I had suddenly been deprived of breath, and I knew no more until, having been dragged into the cabin, I heard Abel Grant cry cheerily:

"Don't waste the whole afternoon comin' 'round, Ephraim, for you've had nothin' worse than a bit of a chokin'."

Staggering to my feet I saw Abel at the helm, and understood from the heel of the sloop that she was under way. Near at hand was Sam, tying a bit of cloth which looked as if it might have been his own shirt-sleeve, around Abe's head, and further on lay the big Tory lashed hand and foot with ropes.

"Where did you come from?" I asked stupidly

of Sam, and he replied with a laugh, as if that which we had been engaged in was nothing more than innocent sport:

"The sloop must have known that it was a case of all the Minute Boys to the rescue, for she fell afoul of the dock within a dozen feet of where Abel an' I were standin'. We saw her comin' down under full sail, an' wondered why you had got under way. Then the stranger at the helm suddenly ran forward, an' by the time she was off where we stood, it would have been a blind man who couldn't see that you fellows had got into some kind of a mess. We didn't come aboard any too soon, an' that's a fact."

"Where are you headin' for?" I asked, still feeling dizzy and with a most uncomfortable feeling in my stomach.

"Anywhere!" Abel shouted from the helm. "There were too many Tories ashore to make it safe anchorage, so we put out into the stream till things were cleaned up a bit. Now if you an' Abe have got your wits about you enough to let us know why these passengers are aboard, we'd like to hear the story."

Abe could not very well act as spokesman while Sam was tying his head up, therefore, in the fewest words possible, I told all we knew concerning the plans of the Tories, adding in conclusion:

"The sooner we set 'em ashore an' get back to where our fathers will be lookin' for the sloop, the better."

"Not a bit of it," Abel replied stoutly. "I ain't one of these 'ere Minute Boys that are downed the first fight they run into, consequently it don't stand me in hand to take command; but I've got

sense enough to know that these precious Tories need to be turned over to some of our people, instead of bein' let go scott free."

"To what end?" I asked irritably, for it seemed to me that the sooner we got out of the muddle the better, while to make any effort to deliver the Tories up as prisoners would only result in our coming into more trouble.

"To the end that we act as honest men should. We'll stand in-shore a bit further on, an' you or Sam shall go up to headquarters, there to tell what has been done, an' to learn if these precious scoundrels are needed."

"Abel is right," Abraham said, for now that the bandage was in place he could speak. "We have no right to let the matter drop as if it concerned us only, an' now if ever is the time when we may show that even a company of only three Minute Boys can do somewhat in aid of the Cause."

CHAPTER II.

THE "DECLARATION."

IT was useless for me to say anything against this project of delivering the prisoners to the military authorities, even had I been so disposed, for all my companions were set in favor of it; yet one had no more right than another to say what should be done.

Therefore it was I held my peace, noting at the same time that Luther was gazing at me fixedly from where he lay bound in much the same fashion as the big Tory.

On the instant it flashed across my mind that the scoundrelly cur was hoping I might oppose the proposition to hold him and his comrade prisoners, for when I gave in to the plan a look both of anger and disappointment overspread his face, and if anything had been needed to convince me of the course we ought to pursue, this would have been sufficient.

"Have it your own way," I said, more as information to Luther Stedman than because the words were needed. "The question is at what point we had best land, and who shall go ashore to acquaint our people with what has been done."

"That is for you to do," Sam replied quickly, thus showing that he had settled the details in his own mind. "It would fall naturally to either you

or Abe, since I am not skillful in the art of wagging my tongue, and if you will but take one look at Master Decker it can plainly be seen that he is not in proper condition to show himself among strangers."

"It will be the worst day's work you ever did, this delivering us up to the Whigs!" Luther cried savagely. "Set us ashore, free and without delay, and I promise to hold my peace concerning the afternoon's work; but so surely as you carry out that which has been agreed upon, so certainly will every Royalist on our island lay it up against you as a debt which shall be repaid soon, and with interest."

"It is exceedingly kind of you, Master Stedman, to agree upon holding your peace if we set you ashore," Abel Grant said with a laugh of derision. "I should be ashamed of these lads if they allowed such as you to frighten them with threatenin' words. So far as my part of the debt is concerned, I will willingly pay it when you an' hundreds of your kidney put me in such a position that it is impossible to help myself."

If a look could have killed, then of a verity would Abel Grant have died at that moment, for Luther shot at him a glance such as I have never seen equaled for venom or hatred.

Abel had already turned the sloop's bow shoreward, evidently counting on striking the bulkhead at the foot of Market Street, and while one might have counted twenty no member of our party spoke. Then it was the big fellow who took it upon himself to conduct the conversation, and he was more wise than Luther had been inasmuch as he began to cajole instead of threaten us.

"It is easy to see that you four be lads of spirit; in fact, it would seem much as if you had writ proof of it on my head. Now because we would have used your sloop to our advantage, and not only failed in the effort, but have been decidedly worsted, I am asking if it is the part of brave fellows to carry the job so far as to deliver us to those who, because we are in a different way of thinking, might so twist that which has happened this afternoon as to make it much to our disadvantage?"

"Do you count it as a joke to steal a boat in order to save from arrest a man who had been plotting murder that he might deliver the town up to the Britishers?" I asked sternly, and he, with such a show of friendliness as would have deceived me had I not received good proof of his enmity, said quietly:

"Because of the turmoil in the streets this day, you have come to fancy that everything which takes place has some connection with what you have heard about the pretended plot. In this case, however, are you wronging a friend of yours and a friend of his country."

"We are not minded to count Luther Stedman as a friend," Abe interrupted savagely, and the big Tory went on with a smile:

"Be that as it may; I will change the offending words so that they shall stand 'a neighbor of yours and his friend,' and whatever there may be of personal grievances between you and my comrade here, you surely at such a time as this, when an innocent man may easily be credited with doing wrong, would not work a wilful injury, else am I mistaken in your faces. We who have been worsted in what I claim to have been a fair fight, accepting

the defeat in manly fashion, ask that the matter may come to an end by our going quietly away whithersoever we may."

"But what about that debt Luther Stedman has spoken of?" Abel asked fiercely.

"Merely idle words; he has not gotten over being hot because we were worsted, and spoke without due heed."

By this time the boat had run alongside the bulkhead at the foot of Market Street, and I, not minded to continue a useless discussion with enemies, leaped ashore.

It had been decided by my comrades that I should be the one to lay information before General Putnam, and noting how useless any further protest would be, I hastened away to acquit myself of the task that we might the sooner return to Master Dyker's dock, where perchance my father might already be awaiting me.

It was not a simple matter to gain entrance to headquarters once I had arrived opposite. The guard outside had been redoubled, probably since the discovery of the Tory plot, and during ten minutes or more I argued and coaxed in vain to be brought before General Putnam.

The soldiers, not believing a lad of my age could have important business with the commander at such a time, refused even to listen unless I was willing to explain all my purpose, and since this I refused positively to do, it seemed much as though I might not succeed. Very like I should have failed utterly, but for the fact that in the very nick of time, when I was pleading most earnestly, Lieutenant Winterbottom, one of the few Whigs on our

island who had enlisted in the American Army, came my way.

To him I appealed with such earnestness that he could not fail of giving ear, and because of knowing that my father was one of the staunchest Whigs on Wallabout bay, he was disposed to do whatsoever he might.

"It is of the utmost importance that I have speech as soon as may be with General Putnam, because of somethin' which has happened within the hour concernin' Luther Stedman, whose father, as you well know, is that Tory who has been tryin' so long for an appointment in the Customs. More than this I cannot say; but if you will conduct me to the general then am I willin' you should be present durin' the interview."

"I am thinking it would be General Putnam who'd say how many should be present," the lieutenant replied with a laugh; "but I will do whatsoever may be, believing you would not have so spoken unless with serious reason."

Now I was afraid of having gone almost too far, for what Abel Grant and my comrades thought was a "serious reason," might not so appear to the commander when my story was told; but I had gotten thus along on my mission, and, as can well be supposed, was not minded to draw back at the very moment when success seemed assured.

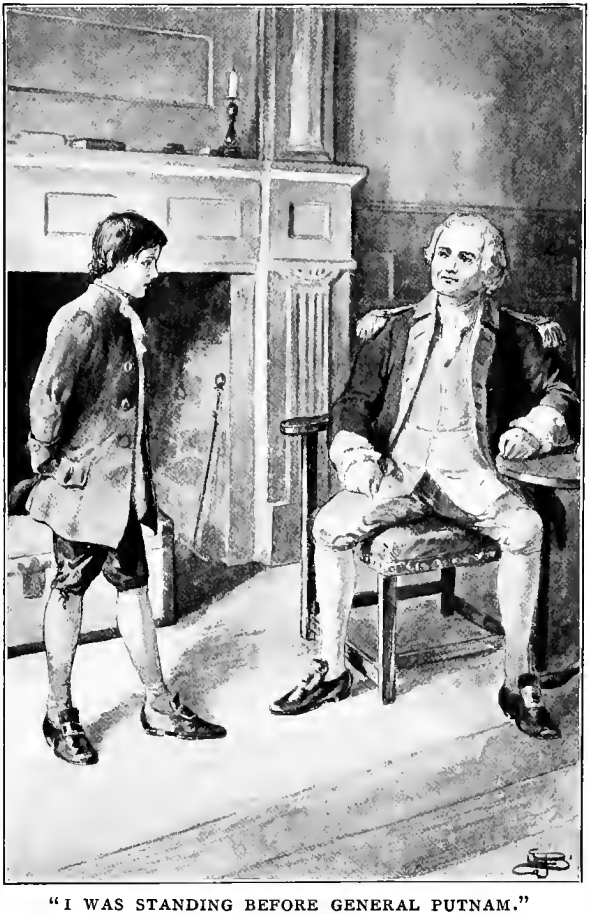
Therefore, but with a timorous fluttering of the heart lest I should be accused of making a mountain out of a mole-hill, I followed the lieutenant into the building, and that he had some influence there, low though his rank in the army was, I understood by the fact that, within less than ten

minutes, I was standing before General Putnam hurriedly telling, as nearly as was in my power, all that had taken place from the time Luther Stedman and his friends came on board the Swiftsure.

The story was not yet come to an end when, to my great relief, I saw that General Putnam did not look upon it as a trifling matter, for his face became unusually grave, and he asked several questions concerning us three lads and our fathers.

While answering them, and without intending so to do, I let slip the fact that Sam, Abe and I called ourselves "The Minute Boys of Long Island," and the words had no sooner escaped my lips than I expected to see the general burst into a hearty laugh because of our folly. Instead of making sport, however, and very greatly to my surprise, he said in a tone as kindly and familiar as though he was speaking to his equal:

"You lads have done well in forming such an organization, even though it number but three. The Cause has need of every arm, and lads of your age, if that which is probable comes to pass, may be of great service. I shall remember you, Master Lyttle, and it may be will call for assistance such as boys can give better than men. And now as to your prisoners: You have done a service this day, such perhaps as your Tory neighbors may strive to repay in a disagreeable manner." Then, turning to Lieutenant Winterbottom, who had remained nearby throughout the interview, he added, "Take with you half a dozen men, for that number may be needed while there are so many people abroad, and go with this lad. Bring back the prisoners he has on board his vessel, and see to it that



"I WAS STANDING BEFORE GENERAL PUTNAM."

they have no speech with anyone until you have arrived."

Very proud did I feel while marching by the side of the lieutenant at the head of a squad of soldiers, for verily was I suddenly become of importance, in my own mind at least; but before having gotten very far on the way the officer checked in a great measure the feelings of pride which were springing up in my heart, by saying with a laugh which had very little in it of mirth:

"I am thinking, Ephraim Lyttle, that in thus striving to work good to the Cause, you are breeding a large sore for yourselves. I know Luther's father, and will give him credit, if any can be attached, for being a vengeful man — one who is not likely to pass by a lad who has done him and his such an ill turn as this may prove. There are not many Whigs on that island of yours, and unless the revelations of this day have sobered the Tories somewhat, Wallabout bay may soon be all too small for your comfort."

"That same thought has already come into my mind, sir, and yet if my father had known of what has taken place this afternoon, I believe he would have commanded me to do exactly as has been done."

"Of that there can be no question, for Master Lyttle is a staunch friend to the Cause, and counts not the cost when aught of good may be performed. Shall you go home this evening?"

"That is as my father shall say; he expects to find the sloop at Master Dyker's dock."

"I believe I know your vessel from having seen Samuel Garratt in her at the Albany Pier. She

is a craft on which you could live without discomfort, and I would have you say this to your father, although mayhap he will not care to take advice from a man so much younger than himself. Nevertheless it can do no harm to repeat the words: It would be better if you three lads cruised about, keeping well to the New York side for the next week or two, until the excitement concerning this plot has died out somewhat."

I would have been a stupid not to have understood what he meant, but after promising to speak to my father as he proposed, I held my peace, and nothing more was said until we arrived at the foot of Market Street.

I had fancied that when he was taken away by the guard Luther Stedman would have said very much that was disagreeable and threatening; but greatly to my surprise he remained silent. His eyes spoke, however, as did those of his companion, and in them I read as plainly as words could have told me, that if ever the time came when they might make reprisals, I would be called upon to pay the debt.

"The sloop seems the cleaner for bein' rid of them," Abel Grant said in a tone of relief when we had watched the prisoners, surrounded by the soldiers in such a manner that it would have been impossible for them to hold any communication with the idlers on the street, march away until they were lost to view in the distance.

"I cannot say whether we have truly been of benefit to the Cause this day," Sam added thoughtfully, and, as I believed then, a trifle nervously; "but it seems that this much is certain: We have so turned matters that it becomes necessary to hold

together as Minute Boys, gettin' as many recruits as possible, for from now on the hand of every Long Island Tory will be against us."

"That is much as Lieutenant Winterbottom believes," I replied, and then told what message he had sent my father, whereupon Abe cried grimly:

"He is in the right so far as concerns our stayin' aboard the sloop; but in the wrong if he fancies one or two weeks will work any change in the situation. Unless General Washington succeeds in gainin' possession of all the country roundabout, an' can successfully oppose the British forces who would come near here, then are our lives in anythin' but pleasant places, an' it seems to me much as if Abel Grant was in the same box with us."

"Ay, lad, that he is," Abel replied, "an' yet a trifle too old to be called a Minute Boy! I'm thinking I had best apply for the position of admiral, using this 'ere craft as my flag-ship, an' allowin' that the Minute Boys of Long Island have not only got an army, but a fleet."

Although Abel spoke in jest, there was to me much in the idea that might be of advantage in case, as General Putnam had so kindly suggested, there should be work for us to do. Such a craft as ours would not only make for us a convenient headquarters, but serve as means of transport in event of our having journeys to perform. Therefore it was that I did not join my comrades in the laugh which followed Abel's speech, and Sam said jestingly:

"Perhaps Ephraim would not be willin' to admit an admiral into the organization, thinkin' that he ought to hold that position as well as the office of commander-in-chief."

Had another lad thus spoken I might have thought there was somewhat of malice in the words; but I knew Samuel Garratt too well to credit him with anything of the kind, and replied in much the same tone he had used:

"Considerin' the fact that the Minute Boys of Long Island haven't even a captain, it strikes me that we are goin' a little fast to count on such officers as commander-in-chief and admiral."

Whereupon Abel said in genuine surprise:

"I had an idea that when you boys made yourselves up into a regiment of Minute Boys, Ephraim Lyttle was the commander."

"And so he is," Abraham and Sam replied emphatically, and, regardless of all I could say they would not have it otherwise, both stoutly declaring that it was in their minds from the start that I was to be the leader.

Now I myself had not been so vain as to believe my comrades would trust in me to such an extent; but I should be setting down a falsehood if I said that such a token of confidence did not please me, for if we should come to do half of that which had been in my mind when we proposed to call ourselves Minute Boys, then had these comrades of mine much the same as put their lives into my keeping, and that you must allow is no slight evidence of faith in another's ability.

"If I am to be the leader," and I spoke jestingly, although my heart was full of gratitude to my comrades, "then my first order shall be that we get under way, for I can see no profit in loiterin' here after the prisoners have been landed, an' much of possible danger, if it should be noised around

that we gave up two Tories to an officer of the American Army.

"That is good sound commonsense," Abel said approvingly, as he hoisted the mainsail, "an' if the general of this 'ere army don't get any further astray in the rest of the orders he gives, I for one will be willin' to follow as well as obey him."

Abel took the helm when we were headed for Master Dyker's dock once more, and I noticed that in tacking he was careful not to venture very near the shore, more particularly when we were standing toward the battery, where was a dense throng of men who appeared even more excited than when I was among them.

"It is just as well to give them a wide berth," the "admiral" said when I laughingly accused him of being afraid of those on the shore. "I am not allowin' that that precious Luther an' the Tory he had with him has been able to spread the news as yet, seein's how young Winterbottom is too good a soldier to let them talk overly much with outsiders while marchin' up to headquarters; but others besides them were in the scheme of stealin' the sloop, an' may be able to understand what has happened as well as if it had been written down plain for 'em, so we won't be overly eager to rub noses with any save those whom we know right well."

We got to Master Dyker's dock just in the nick of time, for as the sloop was hauled in to the stringpiece Abe's father and mine came in sight, and Master Decker, being in advance, jumped on board as he said hurriedly:

"Now then, lads, get under way as soon as may be, for we are in haste to reach Wallabout bay."

Without thinking particularly of what had just happened, I was for obeying this order without delay; but Abel Grant checked me by saying gravely to my father:

"I am thinkin', Master Lyttle, that you had best hear what has been done in your absence before sendin' these lads back to the island," and then without waiting for questions, Abel gave a detailed account of our adventures during the afternoon, concluding by repeating the advice which Lieutenant Winterbottom had given.

If I had any doubts as to whether my father might consider the matter serious, they would have been dispelled when I saw his face while Abel was telling the story. He showed the utmost concern, and, after the tale was done, said slowly and thoughtfully:

"I believe the lieutenant to be in the right. The island is no place for you lads after what has been done, and yet the question is where can you spend such time as may elapse before our forces have either driven out the Tories, or frightened them into submission?"

"This sloop of ours is comfortable enough for lads who count on bein' Minute Boys," Sam suggested, and Abraham's father said:

"If General Putnam had not spoken so seriously regarding the Minute Boy business, I might be inclined to laugh at it; but if such an able general and true American as Israel Putnam thinks you lads can be of service, then it behooves me to hold my peace. As for living aboard the sloop, I see no reason why it might not be done without hardship. You need not put to sea; but by running up to the bulkhead at Oliver Street, nearby where live some

good friends of mine, I believe you would be reasonably safe, and there it would be possible for us to get word to you at any time. However, if Master Lyttle shall agree with me that that is the better course, there is nothing to prevent your carrying us across to the island, so that you do not go ashore!"

In this my father was agreed, and as soon as might be we were on our way, standing directly across, I in the meanwhile wondering how we might fare for food, being thus thrown on our own resources, until Master Decker, taking some money from his pocket, said to my father:

"We will give them enough of silver to provide all hands with food for two or three days, and before more is needed either you or I will have seen them again."

It is not well that I should spend overly much time in telling all the trifles concerning our lives which had no direct bearing upon what we would do for the Cause, therefore it is I shall say that we landed Master Decker and my father on the shore of Wallabout bay, and came back to where it was proposed we should find anchorage, shortly after dark.

Sam took upon himself the duties of cook, and we gave him the money with which to buy provisions, paying but little heed to the possibility that some of the Tories might seek us out even on that first night after we had made prisoners of Luther and his companion.

Very jolly it was living aboard the sloop, with plenty to eat, and going ashore whenever fancy dictated. We spent two idle days, remaining the greater portion of the time in the cabin or on the deck, and then came the morning when it was told

everywhere in the town that Thomas Hickey, he of General Washington's guard who had turned traitor and joined Tryon's plot, was to be hanged on the Common for his crime, he having had a fair trial before the military court, and been found guilty beyond a possible doubt.

Abel Grant was the only member of our party who cared to witness the execution, and I venture to say that there were few lads in New York who remained absent from the horrid spectacle. We felt no doubt but that the fellow richly deserved death, and yet neither of us had the heart to see a human being put to death in such a cold-blooded, even though legal, manner.

Abel jeered at us, declaring that our blood was not as thick as should be the blood of Minute Boys, else we would not be so chicken-hearted, and, having seen the misguided man sent into Eternity, was eager on his return to tell us of the horrible details; but we refused to listen. I was sick at heart, fearing lest Luther Stedman might have been so far guilty as to merit a like punishment. I believe it would have haunted me all the days of my life, had I had a hand in carrying a lad to the gallows.

The days passed on, and we remained anchored off Oliver Street, apparently forgotten by every one save Master Decker and my father, who came from time to time to make certain we were needing nothing and remained in good health.

More than once before the 9th day of July did I insist that we might safely return to our homes; but father and Master Decker both insisted that we were to stay yet longer on the New York side, for it was noised about among our Tory neighbors

that we had sent Luther Stedman to headquarters as prisoner.

Abraham stoutly claimed that it would be better for us to take some chances, rather than remain idling our time away to no purpose, and declared that I had either dreamed the words which I quoted as coming from General Putnam, or else that officer had entirely forgotten us.

However, Abel Grant and Sam were convinced that we could do no better than remain in partial hiding, and so we did, until it was told on the streets one night that Congress had adopted a Declaration of Independence which would be read on the Common next day by General Washington, and then, as Abraham said, we were right glad at being on the spot where we would have plenty of opportunity to see all that might be going on.

And before the day was come to an end we saw very much that must have disheartened the Tories, and certainly did put new life into us Whigs.

Within the limits of the story which I propose to tell, there is not time for me to go into any details as to what our company said or did during that 9th day of July when it was as if all New York was burning with the flame of liberty, and therefore shall I content myself with simply setting down what we saw, for after that time adventures came thick and fast until more than once we had a glut of them.

It was a fine show which the citizens made as they marched toward the Common to hear the reading of the Declaration which we firmly hoped would some day be believed in by all the people of the colonies.

A regular festival with processions, and banners, and music of fifes and drums, and the huzzas of the people, and the shouting of boys, and joyous cries of girls and women, until one would have said that already had we thrown off that yoke which the king would fasten yet more firmly around our necks.

Marching in brave array was a company of sailors led by that Captain Bevan who had command of the Privateer brig Clinton when she captured the French ship La Pomme, and it was as if every one of those seamen was heart and soul a Whig.

Then came the Sons of Liberty, with banners on which were painted "Resistance to tyrants," "All men are created equal," "George III is unfit to be the ruler of the free people," "A Tory is a thing whose head is in England, its body in America, and whose neck ought to be stretched."

After this was a procession of men and women from the markets; then double-files of citizens, and all this throng had hardly more than formed themselves in orderly array around the Common, when the sound of martial music told that the soldiers were coming.

It was a surprise to me to see so many men in uniform, and I could not force myself to believe that the Britishers might come against us in greater number. They marched in on the Common from every quarter, as it seemed to me, until that place was densely covered with human beings, and in the very center of them, a hollow square, within which sat General Washington and his aides on horseback.

I did not hear the commander-in-chief read the

Declaration, because of not being near enough; but shouts from those who were within range of his voice told that the sentiments contained therein were much to their liking, and if there was any Tory among that multitude he had not the courage to raise his head so it might be seen, for I heard neither hiss nor dissenting voice during all the exercise.

When the troops departed we of the sloop were well content to return to her, not because of being afraid that we might meet any who would do us harm, for on that day the Tories had little spirit; but in the belief that our parents might pay us a visit, and yet we did not go.

Just as we were about starting it was noised around among the multitude of people that the statue of the king which stood on Bowling Green, was to be pulled down, and all the unfortunates confined in the prisons for debt were to be released.

It was such a show as we could not well afford to miss seeing, and I would have taken more chances than I believe we then ran, rather than have absented myself voluntarily.

And a wild scene it was when night had come. I question whether there will ever again be in New York such enthusiasm and such a spectacle as we saw after the sun had set. Long ropes were fastened to different parts of the king's effigy, and men and boys tailed on to them, pulling, and shouting, and screaming until the leaden image tumbled headlong to the ground, raising a cloud of dust like as if a dozen cannons had been discharged at the same moment.

It was as if all those people had lost their senses with the downfall of the statue — as if they be-

lieved that by overthrowing the leaden image they had overthrown the king in America, and a wilder scene I never expect to witness. However great my curiosity to see what might be the outcome of it all, for I fancied the revelers were in such a frenzy that this one act would not satisfy them, I was minded to go back to the sloop, and was saying as much to my companions when some one touched me on the shoulder from behind.

Turning I saw Lieutenant Winterbottom, who said in a low tone, as if not caring to be overheard by those near at hand:

"Do you lads from the island still hold yourselves as Minute Boys?"

"Ay, sir, that we do, an' shall so long as we live; but thus far it is simply the matter of a name, for we have had no opportunity of showin' what we might do. No one is needin' our services. We have, in accordance with your advice, been livin' aboard the sloop on this side the harbor; but what may only three lads do for the Cause?"

"Very much, Ephraim Lyttle, if they be so disposed, and are stout-hearted."

He spoke in such a meaning tone that straightway I took fire, believing there was more in his words than as yet appeared, and wheeling upon him suddenly, I cried hoarsely:

"Do you know of aught we may accomplish that would be of benefit to the Cause?"

"As for myself, no; but there are others who do, and if you are minded for a bit of work which is as dangerous as it may be hard, I can show you the road."

"Where? How?" Abraham cried so loud that Lieutenant Winterbottom motioned for him to be

more cautious in his speech, and then replied in a whisper:

"One of you, whosoever is chosen as leader, may come to General Putnam's headquarters to-morrow morning at eight o'clock exactly. I will be there on the lookout, and lead him directly to the general himself, who has a word to say that may be in accord with your desires."

Having said this, Lieutenant Winterbottom wheeled about and made his way through the throng as rapidly as possible, leaving us three lads and Abel Grant staring open-mouthed at each other, unable to so much as speak one word.

CHAPTER III.

ON DUTY.

As a matter of course we lads had hoped, when we decided to call ourselves the Minute Boys of Long Island, that the time would come when we might be called upon for service of benefit to the Cause; but we never dreamed it possible to become of such importance that an officer of the American Army would summon us for real work.

It cannot be wondered at that we were, for the time being, puffed up with pride, or that we found it impossible to do other than stare into each other's faces, wondering whether Lieutenant Winterbottom had understood General Putnam aright, when he was told to summon us.

It was Abel Grant who first gathered his wits, and but for the fact that we knew him so thoroughly well, it might have been believed he was making sport, when he said with that lazy drawl of his:

"It strikes me that I didn't apply any too soon for the situation as admiral with this 'ere organization, cause, now that sich as General Putnam are achin' to hob-nob with you lads, ordinary citizens like myself won't stand any show of gettin' in a word edgeways. Wa'al, why are you standin' there like chickens that have lost their heads? Ain't you countin' on makin' some arrangements for the

visit, or are ye tryin' to decide whether it's to be made or not?"

"Of course it is to be made!" I cried sharply. "A message like that which the lieutenant brought is the same as a positive order, an' if we allow to call ourselves Minute Boys we must take as a direct command any word which comes from those in authority."

"Then why are you hangin' 'round here, where there's a chance of gettin' inter sich trouble with some of these sore-headed Tories that you wouldn't be able to come to time in the mornin'? If I was the general in command of this 'ere regiment, I'd order my men off to the sloop mighty quick, so's to make sure they'd be in proper shape when needed."

It did not strike me that he, or either of my comrades, was waiting for any word from me, and I replied stupidly:

"If you fellows think we should —"

"If *we* think!" Abe interrupted with a laugh. "It is for the leader, not the men, to do the thinkin'! Do you order us aboard the sloop?"

"Now don't be foolish," I cried irritably, for it annoyed me not a little that my companions should expect the word of command from me, who was better fitted to obey than lead. "We are equal as Minute Boys, an' one may say as well as another what should be done."

"Don't make a fool of yourself!" Sam cried sharply. "It has been agreed that you are our leader, an' even though there be but four of us, countin' Abel as a boy, it is necessary that one shall be at the head, else are we like to come to grief if so be we get into a tight place."

"If you will have it so," I cried, far from pleased that they believed I must give the word for every trifling movement. "We'll go back to the sloop where the matter can be discussed without fear our words will be overheard."

On the instant my comrades wheeled about, turning their backs on the scene of riot and confusion which would under any other circumstances have held us chained to the spot, and without giving heed to the revelers on every hand, marched rapidly up town to Oliver Street, never one of us speaking until we were in the cabin of the Swiftsure with the hatch drawn close to shut out eavesdroppers.

There, in whispers, we discussed the possible meaning of General Putnam's order, never once guessing the truth of the matter, nor even dreaming that we were to be employed on matters of the utmost consequence to the American Army. It was in our minds that we were needed for some trifling service; but however slight might be the work required, it was enough to fill us with pride that an officer so high in command as General Putnam had seen fit to send a messenger especially to us as Minute Boys.

Finally, after we had turned the matter over and over again, Abel Grant said with a drawl:

"I don't want it to be thought that the admiral of this 'ere military organization is stickin' his nose in where it don't belong; but yet I'm minded to interfere so far as to say I think it's time for full-fledged soldiers who are ordered to watch over the whole American Army, to turn in. Sittin' up all night waggin' your tongues, ain't any fit way of

makin' ready for the work that's been cut out by the general."

Laughingly we followed this suggestion, knowing it to be a good one, and in a twinkling were stowed as snug as herrings in a box, for the Swiftsure had but two small bunks, and when four were crowded into them there was not overly much room for moving about.

Although I turned in so quickly, it was impossible to close my eyes in slumber readily, so excited was I by the words of Lieutenant Winterbottom had spoken. I twisted and turned as best I could while Abel Grant was my bedfellow, and it seemed as if the night must have been well nigh at an end when I lost myself in the unconsciousness of slumber.

Although our appointment with General Putnam was set at eight o'clock, Abel Grant wakened us at the first crack of day, declaring that we had no more than sufficient time in which to prepare for the meeting with the commander, when, as a matter of fact, there was nothing whatever that we needed in the way of preparation, save to wash our faces and hands with exceeding care, for the clothes in which we stood comprised the whole of our wardrobe.

However, as Sam said, it was better to be early than late, and by thus beginning the day at the very dawn, we were able to cook and eat our breakfast leisurely, after which came the question as to whether my comrades would escort me down to Bowling Green, or let me take leave of them at the sloop.

Now it was that I urged one of the others to go

in my stead, and, failing in that, insisted that they accompany me as far as might be possible. A full hour before the time appointed did we set out from the foot of Oliver Street, inspecting, as we walked leisurely along, the defenses of New York which had been set up in anticipation of an attack by the enemy.

Thus it was that we had a leisurely view of McDougall's Battery, the four guns near Trinity Church; of the Broadway Barrier, with its two guns near to where the king's statue had so lately stood; and of the batteries at nearly all the slips on the East River, as well as at the Coffee House, the Market, the Exchange, and in Broad Street.

After thus viewing a small portion of the defenses which had been erected for the reception of the enemy and defense of the city, it seemed to me of a verity that we need have no fear concerning what the Britishers might do. Ignorant as I was of warfare, it appeared to me then as if New York was so thoroughly defended as to render impossible its capture; but before another twelve months had gone over my head I realized how weak and poor were these so-called batteries and barriers, which in fact deserved no better name than that of barricades.

However, we Minute Boys were not out on this morning to learn the art of warfare, or to criticise the work of those whose duty it was to defend the town. The only important matter before us was this interview with General Putnam, and all the speculations we indulged in tended in the same direction, as to whether, if we succeeded in doing the commander's bidding on this day, the work would be of such importance that we might really

consider ourselves as being numbered among the defenders of the Cause.

The sentinel on the battery at Bowling Green was crying the hour of eight when I, with a great fluttering of the heart, went toward headquarters, which was in the first building on the Broadway, hardly expecting that Lieutenant Winterbottom would remember the rendezvous which he himself had appointed, and wondering what I should do in case of failure to see him.

"Remember, lad, that you are to be just as perky as if the Minute Boys of Long Island numbered one hundred, instead of three," Abel Grant called after me when I left my comrades at a point where they could see me as I entered the building, in case of my so doing, and be ready to hear the result of the interview immediately I came out. And these words rang in my ears as I walked leisurely toward the sentinel who was pacing to and fro in front of the building.

To my great surprise, even though I had been expecting to see him, Lieutenant Winterbottom came out of the house as I drew near, and with a word to the sentinel on duty, that he might allow me to pass, opened the door.

Taking this as an invitation to enter, I stepped inside, feeling more like a culprit than a lad who had been summoned, perhaps, to do the work of a man, and almost unconsciously I followed the lieutenant as he led the way to the rear room, where I saw seated before a table which did service also as desk, a soldierly-looking and not unkindly appearing man.

There was no need to tell me who he was, for I had seen General Putnam before, and it was

evident he remembered me, although the lieutenant appeared to think an introduction necessary, for he made it by saying:

"General, this is the lad whom you wanted."

"Ay, lieutenant, he and I have met before. You may close the door as you go out, sir."

This was evidently an intimation that even Lieutenant Winterbottom was not to know what passed between us, and although such fact should have filled me with pride, yet did it cause alarm, for it seemed much as though I was about to be charged with some misdemeanor; but this nervous fear passed away very quickly when the general said after we were alone:

"Well, lad, are you Minute Boys still holding together, or has the fear of what may be done by the friends of those Tories whom you sent to me, induced you to disband?"

"We are yet holding together, sir, though our number is not increasing, unless it so be that we take Abel Grant on as admiral, according to his own suggestion."

At this the general smiled, as if I had said something comical, and asked humorously:

"So you believe a naval officer necessary, eh?"

"Well, sir, you see we have the sloop, and some one must handle her. Besides, I am thinkin' that Abel would join us as a Minute Boy were it not for his being so much older, an', wantin' to remain with us, he makes as excuse the proposition that we are needin' a sailor."

"I can fancy that he may be very useful, if you are yet inclined to labor in behalf of the Cause."

"That we are, sir, an' shall feel proud if there be anythin' whatsoever we may do. Don't think

I am boastin' when I say that we should be able to perform the work of men, for we lads are of considerable age already."

"Yes, my boy, these are times when children as well as men grow old rapidly. It is possible for you to be of great aid to the American Army. To my mind the only reason why you may fail of so doing is that the enemy capture you too soon, for hark you, lad, this duty I would put upon the Minute Boys of Long Island, is indeed a man's work, although I believe you who have been in the custom of sailing around the harbor in your boat, might effect more than good soldiers, because of being less likely to arouse suspicion. In a way, this is what I desire: The enemy's fleet have already arrived off Sandy Hook, and as yet we have no definite information as to the strength of the force. What I desire is that you shall cruise nearabout the British vessels until it is possible to give us the fullest information concerning them. This is not as simple a matter as you may suppose," he added on seeing that I was about to interrupt. "Orders will have been given for the arrest of any who may be found in the vicinity of the vessels without having been summoned, and I am free to say that the chances in favor of your being made prisoners are many."

At this point the general ceased speaking and looked at me inquiringly, whereupon I said, trying to make myself appear as brave as possible:

"We will do all that lads may, sir. When shall we set off?"

"Without delay, and you will make report as soon as you have learned anything definite. For example, we will suppose that you have been able

to give us the number and names of the ships lying at anchor before arousing the suspicions of the enemy. In such event, you will send one of your number, as privately as may be, here to me with the information. In the meanwhile the remainder of your crew will stay near at hand, on whatsoever pretext you may devise, to gain further knowledge, and if you see a movement among the fleet which betokens an immediate advance on this city, consider not the hazard of the undertaking, but come to me at once."

"Very well, sir," I said, making my best bow, and thinking the interview was at an end, but before I could leave the room he checked me, by saying:

"Open that door, and summon Lieutenant Winterbottom."

On doing as he directed I found the lieutenant stationed very near the door as if on duty, and without waiting for me to speak he entered, whereupon the general said to him in a tone of command:

"Take this order to the quartermaster's office, and see that these lads be given of stores sufficient to victual four men for ten days, the same to be delivered at whatever quarter of the city is most convenient for them."

Then he wrote a few words on a slip of paper, and handing it to the lieutenant, asked of me:

"Have you weapons on board your craft?"

"No sir," I replied, and with truth, although but for the fact of seeming to speak on serious subjects in a jesting manner, I would have added that we still had the stove-leg which Abraham had used with such effect on Luther Stedman's companion.

"It is not well you should be armed, for you are

supposed to be simply lads who are curious to gain a glimpse of the English fleet. At the same time it might not go amiss if you had one weapon aboard, and, Lieutenant Winterbottom, you will see that they are provided with a musket and fifteen or sixteen rounds of ammunition."

Having said this the general took up some papers from his desk as if considering the interview at an end, and without waiting for further instructions the lieutenant motioned for me to pass out at the door he opened, saying when we were in the hallway:

"So it seems that you lads have become members of the army at short notice?"

"But the task given us is not what I should call a soldierly one, being simply to —"

"Stop, stop, lad! When you entered the room General Putnam sent me outside, which was the same as if he had announced that the interview should be private, therefore it is not for you to repeat, save it may be necessary to your companions, anything which he said. All I need know is where you will have the provisions and the musket delivered?"

"Our sloop is lyin' at the Oliver-Street bulkhead."

"And you intend going away in her, I suppose?"

"Ay; we are to leave as soon as may be."

"The stores will be sent to the foot of Oliver Street, and within the hour if possible."

Having said this the lieutenant opened the outer door; but did not follow me, and when I was in the street once more there stood my companions on the opposite side, looking, as no doubt they felt, keenly curious regarding the result of the interview.

Without halting, I beckoned for them to follow, and as we walked up the Broadway I repeated that which had been said, much as is set down here, and was not a little surprised to hear Abel Grant cry exultantly:

"Now that's what I call work fit for the best, an' the wonder of it is that General Putnam should have entrusted it to those whom he knew as little as he knows us! So you told him I claim to be admiral, eh?"

"I fail of seeing in what way the task can be of such great importance," I said hesitatingly. "It seems to me any who owned a boat might perform it equally well."

"That may be," Sam cried in a tone of satisfaction. "And yet we are the ones whom he selected. It seems to me that by his own showin' he considered the work of great importance, in addition to bein' dangerous."

"Ay, and that is what it is," Abel Grant declared. "To spy out the enemy's forces, an' be able to do it properly, is such big work that the chances of bein' taken prisoners don't count, as I'm lookin' at it. So you told him I was to be admiral, eh?"

"It is certain that if we succeed in the first part of the business our company is to be divided by sendin' some one of us back to New York," Abraham said thoughtfully, as if wondering how that might be done, and I confess it had troubled me even when the general spoke; but, not minded to let my comrades believe there was any difficulty in it, I replied carelessly:

"To us who know the island so well, it should

not be difficult, after a fellow has been set ashore, for him to make his way here. However, that is somethin' to be considered later, when we have the needed information."

"So you told the general that I counted on bein' admiral, eh?" Abel Grant repeated after a short time, and it seemed necessary I answer the question, else might he keep on asking it until we were wearied with the sound of the words.

"Ay, so I told him," I replied.

"An' what did he say?"

"That it seemed to him very necessary we should have some one to take charge of the sloop."

"Then I am allowin' that you Minute Boys have no right to interfere with my takin' charge of the fleet, since no less than General Putnam himself has sanctioned it," and Abel spoke in a tone of triumph, whereupon Sam added laughingly:

"If one small sloop can be called a fleet, then are you the admiral," and Abel, heeding not the tone of derision, said soberly:

"Ay, that I am, an' with none to interfere after once we're afloat."

Surely I had no protest to make if Abel Grant wanted to consider himself admiral of a fleet consisting of one small sloop, and, besides, the matter was entirely too trifling, as compared with that we had on hand, to admit of wasting any words; therefore I held my peace, quickening the pace, however, lest the stores which Lieutenant Winterbottom was to send should arrive before we were come to Oliver Street.

Abe would have questioned there on the street as to how we had best set about the task in hand;

but I prevented any such carelessness by assuming for the first time my rights as leader of the party, and saying:

"Everythin' connected with our work is a secret which we should guard if for no other reason than our own safety. Don't think that I am overly concerned because of myself; but it must be borne in mind that whatsoever may happen to us affects the purpose for which we are sent, therefore are our lives of consequence until we have done what is required."

This was sufficient to silence my comrades, and not a word was spoken until we were once more in the cabin of the Swiftsure, with the hatch opened so that we might not only see when the men sent by Lieutenant Winterbottom arrived, but also to make certain there was no one within earshot.

Then it was that I began to put into words the thoughts which had been in my mind concerning the way we would set about the work of spying upon the fleet, and much to my surprise found that Abel Grant had already settled upon a plan which seemed so good and reasonable that we could not do otherwise than adopt it at once.

"If you Minute Boys set out takin' a roundabout course, as if you had a lot of things to hide from other people, then have the Britishers, in case we run across any, as is most likely, good reason to suspect that we are more than curious ones intent only upon seein' the king's fleet. Now it stands us in hand to lay in a goodly store of fishin' gear, an' there's your excuse for goin' through the Narrows. Besides, if we take on board a fare of bluefish, or somethin' of that kind, we have a reason for loiterin' among the fleet through wantin' to sell our

wares, an', in case there are many vessels in the lower bay, fishermen should be welcomed."

"Yes," I said, seeming to hesitate, although I knew full well that Abel's plan was a wise one; "but how may we get the gear, seein' that we have little or no time to spend. The general's orders are that we leave at once, or as soon as the stores are taken on board."

"An' I see no reason why they should not be obeyed," the admiral of the fleet replied without hesitation. "I reckon you three Minute Boys can muster strength enough among you to take aboard such provisions as the lieutenant sends, an' in the meantime I will go down to Jethro Dyker's. If so be he won't lend us the gear, I'll make a dicker, an' with what money I've got, should be able to buy all that will be needed."

"Abel is in the right," Abraham said decidedly, and I could not have contradicted him if I would; but furthered his scheme by insisting that he take whatsoever money we had among us to help out in the purchase. It was while we were searching our pockets for small coin, Abel gave another proof that he should have been the leader of the party, instead of only the admiral of a single sloop, by saying:

"No one can tell how long this 'ere cruise is likely to last, more especially if the Britishers, gettin' suspicious, should gather us all in as prisoners, an', that bein' done, what think you your people would suppose had happened?"

"All that is to be counted as the fortunes of war," I replied loftily, thereby proving myself a simple, for Abel took the wind out of my sails very speedily, when he said:

"It will be the fortune of war if we are taken prisoners; but it comes mighty near to being wicked neglect if you fail of sendin' some word to the island. What's to hinder leavin' a message with Master Dyker, or Jethro, to the effect that you have been sent away on important business? I'm allowin' your folks can guess the reason."

"Surely they can, an' I am a simple not to have thought of such a thing before," was my reply spoken in as jolly a tone as could be assumed, for I was feeling a bit sore because of having the matter thus called to my attention when it should have been my duty, as the leader, to have thought of it first.

"Then it is agreed that I shall not only bargain with Jethro for the fishin' gear; but deliver the message?" Abel said questioningly, and, seeing that my comrades agreed, I replied:

"Ay, send whatsoever information you can without arousin' suspicion, for even though Jethro be a friend to the Cause, I hold that we are not warranted in repeatin' what has been said by the general."

Abel set off without further delay, and he could not have arrived at Master Dyker's dock before a cart, in which were two soldiers and a reasonably large supply of goods, was driven down to the water's edge.

"Surely the general did not intend we should starve while servin' the Cause," Sam said laughingly, as he went on shore to aid in taking aboard the goods.

Never before had the Swiftsure had in her cabin such a supply of eatables. We were provisioned for at least a month's cruise, with potatoes, salt

pork, ship's biscuit, and even the very best of butter, if you please.

That the store was generous, could be told by that which one of the soldiers said when we had unloaded the cart:

"It is a pity that we who serve in the American Army could not be outfitted in the same fashion! Why are you taking these 'ere stores board that sloop?"

"Because you have brought them, I suppose," Abe replied with a laugh.

"But I allow they are for the benefit of some of the officers, whereas we who carry a musket must get along on salt fish and potatoes, without any such luxuries as butter and pork."

"You don't look as though you came very near bein' starved," Sam said laughingly, for the fellow was as fat as a pig made ready for a fair, and he, seemingly realizing that he had spoken foolishly, turned the scarecrow of a horse townward without further parley.

Even before we carried our provisions aboard did we inspect the weapon, and truly it was a good one — as good as could be found anywhere in the American Army, with even more of ammunition than seemed necessary.

We had no more than gotten all these things stowed snugly in the sloop's cabin when Abel Grant returned, and from the burden which he carried it was evident that Jethro Dyker had made no very serious protest against supplying us with fishing gear.

"I'm allowin' here's enough to make it look as if we were out for business," Abel said as he entered the cabin, and, there seeing the stores which oc-

cupied nearly every inch of the deck space, he added as if in alarm: "Who sent all that?"

"Two soldiers brought it," and Abraham laughed heartily at the expression of dismay on the "admiral's" face. "Are you goin' to find fault because we are outfitted in good shape?"

"Ay, that I am," Abel Grant said decidedly. "Supposin' a Britisher, havin' suspicions that we are sneakin' around the fleet for some other purpose than that of sellin' fish, should take it into his head to see what we had in the cabin, an' find all this? Do you allow it would be possible to make him believe we was tryin' to get an honest livin' sellin' fish? Did you ever see a fisherman's cuddy stacked as full of good things as an alderman's cellar?"

I began to see that there was sound commonsense in the "admiral's" protest, for had we been fishermen, as it was intended we should claim to be, the cuddy of the Swiftsure would have had in it no more of provisions than might serve perhaps for two or three meals.

But the goods were there, and we could not waste them. The matter began to present itself to my comrades as it had to me, and we who a few moments before had been so joyous because of the plenty in the larder, now gazed at each other ruefully, until Sam asked:

"Well, how are we to help ourselves? We can't throw good food overboard?"

"Never!" Abel Grant replied with a sudden brightening of the face as he saw a way out of the difficulty. "We needn't waste the stuff; but carry it ashore before going through the Narrows. I allow to know of a place where it can be stowed

near the shore, an' we may draw from it as seems necessary."

This seemed to dispose of the possible difficulty, and, there being nothing to prevent our getting under way, for Jethro had promised to send word to our parents, I suggested that the "admiral" take charge of his end of the expedition.

Five minutes later the sloop was under way, heading with a light wind down the stream on a cruise which would admit of our passing between Governor's Island and the Brooklyn shore.

The Minute Boys were at last in service, acting directly under orders of the commander, and I promised myself as we sailed slowly down past Bowling Green, that if aught happened to prevent our carrying out the instructions received, it should not be through fault of mine.

"I'll weigh carefully every word before speakin', and think of all the possibilities before decidin' on any course of action," I said to myself, and the words were no more than formed in my mind when, looking seaward, I saw a skiff, in which were two men, that had evidently just set off from New York.

There was in such a sight nothing out of the ordinary, because small craft were continually plying to and fro between New York and Brooklyn; but in this case it seemed ominous that at the very moment when we lads were attempting to play the part of Minute Boys, Luther Stedman and the big Tory whom we had taken prisoner, should cross our path.

At the instant this thought came into my mind, Abraham said sharply, motioning with his thumb in the direction of the skiff:

"How does it happen, think you, that those two are at liberty? It seemed to me when we turned them over to the squad of soldiers, that they were like to stay in one place for a long time."

"It must be that, save for the conversation which we overheard, there was no proof they were engaged in any act of treason against the Cause, an' therefore could no longer be held prisoners," I said, striving to assure myself at the same time I set at rest the fears of my comrades.

That Abraham was not reassured, and that the others had much the same forebodings as had I concerning this inopportune meeting with the two men whom we had every reason to consider enemies, could be read plainly in the face of my companions, and I set it down as an ill omen.

CHAPTER IV.

THE ENEMY.

It did not take me very long to realize that I was making a simple of myself, by feeling disturbed in mind because we had chanced to meet Luther Stedman and his big friend at the beginning of our voyage.

The fact that we lads had not been called on as witnesses since we delivered our prisoners to the military authorities, was good proof that there was little or no evidence against Luther and his friend, save that which Abe and I could have given, and this last would not have gone far toward convicting them of any serious crime.

Thinking the matter over as I sat near Abel Grant gazing at the skiff astern, I came to the conclusion that the two young Tories had simply been held prisoners until it was positive they could not give important information, and were then discharged. Thus at liberty, it was by no means strange that we should run across them, for the waters of the harbor were as free to Tory as to Whig, and it did not stand to reason they would remain under cover mourning because we had so successfully blocked their game.

"There's no good reason why you should trouble your head about those two," Abel Grant said, mo-

tioning with his thumb toward the distant skiff. "They'll hug home pretty close while our people hold New York, an' we are likely to be in the lower bay for quite a spell, because this business of ours won't be brought to an end very soon, no matter how much of news we come across."

"I'm not troublin' myself," I replied, trying to appear unconcerned. "It was only because they showed themselves at the exact moment when we were startin' on what may be a dangerous enterprise, that I felt a bit disagreeable."

"If sich as that is all we have to bother us betwixt now an' the time we make New York agin, I shall think we're playin' in the biggest kind of big luck," he replied in a low tone, and I added nervously:

"Is it in your mind that we are likely to meet with many dangers?"

"That is a question you can answer as well as I. Does it strike you as bein' child's play to spy on the British fleet, when we know without bein' told that every man jack of 'em will be on the look-out for sich as us?"

"What are you two mutterin' about?" Abe, who was seated well forward, asked with a laugh. "One would think, Eph, that you had seen a ghost, by the whitenin' of your face when Luther Stedman hove in sight."

I was vexed beyond measure because of evidently having given proof that a glimpse of the Tory disturbed me, and said curtly:

"Your eyes must have been playin' tricks, if you fancied there was any change in my face when the cur came in sight. I was wonderin' why he had been set free, that's all."

Abe laughed incredulously as I made this explanation, which did not tend to improve my temper, therefore I turned squarely around on the thwart so that he might not be able to look into my eyes, and in so doing saw, much to my surprise, that the skiff which had been headed for New York, was now coming directly in our wake.

Sam took note of the fact at the same moment, and cried shrilly:

"It begins to look as if already was our mission discovered! Yonder Tories have it in mind to know where we are goin'."

Now it was Abel Grant's turn to look disturbed, and he swung the tiller up ever so slightly, as he said half to himself:

"I reckon we're not in such a hurry that we can't spend a few hours puttin' them curs off the scent. There's no question but that they are minded to know where we're headin' for, an' we'll run into Gowanus creek as if not countin' on goin' any further. I'm allowin' though, that we'd better not try to put any of the stores ashore."

I was well content to consider Abel as the admiral, for I knew beyond a peradventure that he was a better leader than I could ever hope to be at a time like this, and to tell the truth, this seeming pursuit at the very outset, caused me to be more timorous than was decent in a commander of Minute Boys, even though his following numbered only three.

The skiff followed until we swung around into Gowanus creek, and then the Tories lay back on their oars to see what we were about.

"We're needin' a few clams for bait," Abel Grant said as he gave word for the anchor to be

dropped and the jib hauled down. "The tide don't serve exceedin' well for sich work, but fishermen must take what they can get an' look pleasant about it. Into the punt, all three of you; I'll keep ship."

We obeyed the order hurriedly, and Abel added in a low tone when he saw me looking over my shoulder at those in the skiff:

"It's clams you're after, not Tories, lad. This is no time to let 'em see we're suspicious, else we might as well have kept on through the Narrows."

During the next half-hour we labored with a will, as if our very existence depended upon getting the greatest amount of clams in the shortest possible space of time, and then Abel, who had for some time been standing in the stern-sheets gazing in the direction of the town, cried cheerily:

"I reckon you may come aboard now, lads, for those curs who would serve the king but don't dare to put on red coats, are headin' for Bowling Green. We've shut their eyes for a few hours; but can count it as certain that they'll make it their business to know if we come back within a reasonable length of time."

"Which is the same as sayin' that it will soon be known to the king's friends in New York that we have gone out spyin'," Abe added grimly, and without any show of fear.

"Wa'al, that's not so certain. You've been through the Narrows before to-day in this sloop, an' why shouldn't you go agin? The Tories may have suspicions, but can't set anythin' down against us as a fact, though I'm willin' to admit that they have a fair chance to make no end of trouble."

We had dug near to a barrel of clams while

waiting to throw Luther Stedman off the track, and surely it was not time wasted if we would play the part of fishermen, for to go through the Narrows without a goodly supply of bait would have been folly.

It was well that we had been forced to lay by in such manner, and the young Tories had really done us a favor, as we soon came to know, after getting into Gravesend bay shortly before sunset, for there before us, stretching away as far as the eye could reach, was the British fleet. I thought I had seen a brave showing of vessels before, but now it was as if all the ships in the world lay at anchor 'twixt us and Sandy Hook.

"It looks as if the friends of the king counted on takin' New York in a hurry!" Abe cried after gazing at the wondrous scene a few moments in silence. "There must be men enough aboard that fleet to over-run all the colonies, crushin' us out of existence by very press of numbers."

"Ay, lad, an' it begins to look as if Luther Stedman an' his friends would have a chance to crow over us mighty soon," Abel Grant said in a mournful tone. "There were few except Tories on Long Island yesterday, and now, after seein' this gatherin', I'm allowin' you can't find above twenty men there who'll admit they ever believed the Americans had a right to the land."

To me, it was as if New York was already taken, for I had no question but that it could be only a matter of a few hours before our people would be captured or driven out, and I asked nervously:

"Why don't you put about, Abel Grant? We should be able to run up with this wind, before daylight to-morrow."

"Why would you have us turn tail before beginnin' the work cut out for our doin'?" the "admiral" asked as if in surprise.

"We must tell General Putnam of what we have seen. We were to put back, or send some one of the company whenever we had learned aught of importance, an' of a verity a sight like that is of big moment to him."

"Did you think for a little minute that he didn't know the fleet was there?" Abel asked with a grin. "How does it happen that he sent us down to spy out the strength, if he hadn't a fairly good idee of what was hereabout?"

"But surely he couldn't have known how many ships were here, else it would have been of retreat rather than spyin', that had a place in his mind."

"You can set it down as a fact that he knew even more than we do now, an' I shall be way out of my reckonin' if our forces run away without makin' some show of a stand. Don't get it inter your head that all these are ships of war! I can make out transports an' store-ships more than enough to balance the vessels of the navy. 'Cordin' to the orders received, I'm of the mind that we should stand straight down to the Hook, if so be they let us get that far, takin' careful note of the guns that may be brought to bear on the city."

It only needed this sharp speech from Abel Grant to bring me to my senses, and in a twinkling I understood that what he said was true. But now I began to have a good idea of what General Putnam had meant, when he spoke of the danger which we would encounter. There it was before us, good

and plenty, and I was forced to swallow hard in order to force down the big lump which timorousness had sent into my throat as we stood on, heading directly for the biggest frigate.

"Don't be afraid to look at 'em," the "admiral" said in a whisper, although we were not yet come within earshot of the sentries. "If we were here to fish, an' nothin' more, it is only natural that our eyes would be bulgin' in surprise, for I question if so big a fleet ever before has been seen in these waters."

Without Abel Grant I am afraid our cruise would have come to a sudden end, for verily I was not fit to act the part of leader when before me was such a force of the enemy, and one glance at Sam was sufficient to show that he believed the Minute Boys were getting beyond their depth. Abraham Decker was the only member of our company, with the exception of Abel Grant, who did not appear frightened, and I made up my mind then and there that if we ever succeeded in returning from this venture, he, not me, should be the captain of our party.

However, I had sufficient wit remaining to stare about me like a simple, as the "admiral" had suggested, and we bore down on the frigate at a snail's pace, for the wind had flattened out considerably, while the tide was against us.

We were nearly abreast the enormous vessel with her row upon row of ports, from each of which protruded a gun, before the enemy apparently gave any heed to us, and then we were hailed from the quarter-deck by some petty officer.

"Ahoy on the sloop!"

"Ay, ay, sir!" Abel Grant replied with a more pronounced drawl than ever.

"Sheer in this way and give an account of yourselves!"

"I don't allow as we've got very much of a story to tell," Abel replied as he brought the sloop around ever so slightly; "but you shall hear what there is of it, if so be you're achin' for news."

"Where are you bound?" the officer asked while we were slowly drifting down on the frigate's quarter.

"After bluefish, sir."

"What have you in the cockpit?" the Britisher asked curiously.

"Clams for bait."

"Make ready to send them up."

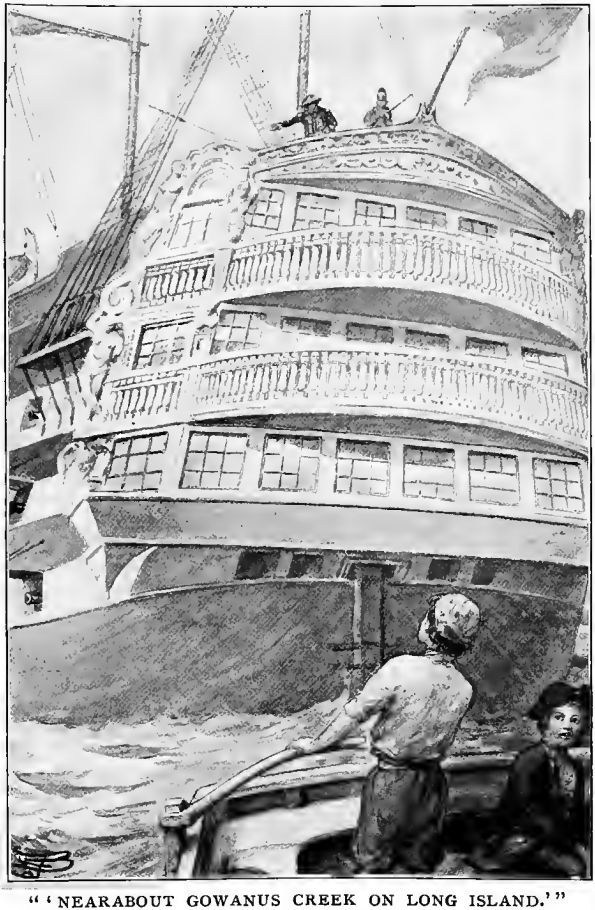
"Why we couldn't do that, sir, seein's how we ain't got more'n we'll need for bait," Abel cried as if in alarm, and playing the simple so well that the most suspicious must have been deceived.

"Make ready to send them up, do you hear?" the officer cried sharply, and Abel, as if flustered by this stern command, danced around like one who has lost his senses as he gave this order and that to us lads, none of which could have been obeyed even if we had understood them.

"You'll have to send down a bag, if you count on takin' what we've got, sir." Abel whined. "We haven't a blessed thing here to put 'em into."

The Britisher said something in a low tone to the half dozen grinning sailors who were craning their heads over the rail amidships, and by the time we had come alongside to where was hanging a ladder, two bags had been thrown aboard.

"Gather 'em up," Abel said to us as if his heart



"'NEARABOUT GOWANUS CREEK ON LONG ISLAND.'"

was breaking. "I'm allowin' the gentlemen will pay a fair price for the clams; but we won't have a chance to get any more till the tide turns, which will keep us down here another four an' twenty hours."

"You're fortunate if we don't seize the whole outfit, instead of only a beggarly lot of clams," the Britisher said angrily. "If I hear anything more about a price for them, you shall come aboard to wait till we can find out more about your craft."

It surely seemed as if this threat deprived Abel Grant of what little wit he had remaining, for he jumped around like a crazy man, helping us to gather the clams into the bags, as if believing his very life depended upon getting them aboard the frigate quickly.

"Now be off with you," the officer said when we had sent the full bags aboard, "and if you get fresh fish, come alongside when you go home. What's doing in New York?"

"I can't say, sir, seein's I don't live there, an' a big place like that ain't for poor fishermen, except when they've got a cargo to sell."

"Where do you live?"

"Nearabout Gowanus creek on Long Island."

We had already cast off from the frigate and were slipping slowly past her by the time this reply was given, and only then did I draw a natural breath, for it seemed certain we would be ordered aboard as prisoners.

We were hailed by the ship astern, and before a question could be asked, Abel Grant shouted at the full strength of his lungs, as if trying to give the information to all the craft in the bay:

"We're bound outside fishin', an' haven't got

any clams, 'cause the man on that 'ere craft took all we had without ever payin' a cent for 'em!"

A roar of laughter went up from every ship within sound of his voice, and we were not ordered alongside another vessel until after getting well down into the lower bay. Owing to the fact of our moving so slowly, it was possible to take careful note of every craft, and I had recovered somewhat from my timorousness on seeing that the transports and store-ships outnumbered the armed vessels as six to one. But the number of red-coats we saw! I dare venture to say we passed thousands before going half the distance to the Hook, and yet there were more transports ahead of us.

"It's only a question of their takin' New York when they get ready," I said in a whisper to Abel Grant, for I had so far mastered my fears by this time that it was possible to face the situation with some degree of calmness, and he replied in the same cautious tone:

"There'll be a deal of blood shed before that's done, lad, else General Putnam never'd sent us down here spyin'. I wish we had a couple more hours of daylight."

"Why?"

"So we could run past the whole fleet before sendin' word back."

"Do you allow that we have information enough yet?"

"It ain't so much our news, as the fact that somebody must get away mighty soon, else the general stands a chance of never hearin' from his spies?"

"What do you mean?" I asked in surprise, for

Abel had spoken in so grave a tone that I knew he had some very serious matter in his mind.

"The bad luck came for us when that whipper-snapper of a Britisher took it inter his head to seize our clams —"

"But we can easily get more when the tide turns," I interrupted.

"Ay, lad, I ain't distressin' myself over that part of it; but the mischief was done when we ran alongside the frigate. Now I'm allowin' that Luther Stedman an' his fat friend will make it their business to find out whether we went home after clammin' in Gowanus creek, an' by this time they're makin' up their minds to bring word down here that we're a crew of the hottest kind of Whigs. In case I'm right, what craft would they be likely to board first?"

"Why the frigate, of course, for she's at the head of the line, an' nearest the town."

"Right you are, lad, an' havin' had speech with that clam-lovin' Britisher, it won't work his brain very hard to guess all about us. Then you can make up your mind that a boat or two will be sent out to round us up as prisoners, consequently I'm allowin' that one of this 'ere party best try to work back while there's time."

"An' are you countin' that we shall all be taken prisoners?" I asked, my voice trembling despite every effort to render it steady.

"Not much I don't!" was the emphatic reply. "There's a big difference 'twixt bein' pulled up with a sharp turn by some of these 'ere Britishers, an' gettin' back to the town. Unless they set to work mighty soon, I'll agree to keep out'er their clutches for quite a spell; but won't agree that we

can send word to New York whenever we feel like it. I'm allowin', in case we're left to do as we please, to haul in behind Coney Island when we get there, which is only what any honest fisherman would be likely to do."

Abe and Sam could not but overhear what had been said, and because they took the matter so quietly I fancied both had realized the situation some time before, while I, who was supposed to be the leader, had been the only one who failed to understand what was before us.

"I'm reckonin' we can carry a good bit of news back," Abel Grant said thoughtfully. "We've had a fairly full view of the whole show, an' should be able to say about how many guns there are in the fleet. Now if we could make a reasonable guess as to where they might be countin' on makin' a landin', the first part of our job would be done in decent shape."

"Don't you suppose they will sail directly up to the town?" I asked in surprise, for I was so thick-headed as to fancy such a fleet and army could do very nearly what they pleased.

"The Britishers ain't quite sich fools as to think our people can be walked over without kickin' up any fuss, an' you'll see that they go kind'er cautious. Of course they're likely to land somewhere on Long Island, an' I'd give one of my ears to say where to a certainty," and Abel Grant rubbed his chin as if by so doing he could the more readily solve the problem.

"Who is to go back with word of what we have seen?" Abraham asked after a brief time of silence.

"It seems to me that Abel ought to be the messenger."

"That's where you're way out of your reckonin'," the "admiral" replied quickly and hotly. "I'm in charge of this 'ere fleet, an' it never'd do to desert my post. Eph can't leave, seein's he's commander of the land forces, so, 'cordin' to my figgerin', it lays 'twixt Abe an' Sam."

I felt confident they would be glad of an opportunity to get away from the trouble that must come to us in case Abel Grant was in the right as to what Luther Stedman and his big friend might do; but much to my surprise both the lads wanted to stay, and if anything had been needed to prevent me from showing the white feather, it would have been the discussion that ensued as to which was entitled to remain in the place of danger.

"I'm allowin' that whoever is to go, leaves as soon after we come to anchor as he can get ashore," Abel Grant said, interrupting the wordy quarrel between the boys. "You'll never be able to settle the matter yourselves, without comin' to blows, so s'posen you let Ephraim name the messenger?"

"I wouldn't be willing to do that," and I did not really feel as if I had the right to do so.

"Then it'll be a case of drawin' lots, so's to have everythin' ready for a quick move," Abel announced, and to this I agreed as the only fair plan, whereupon Abraham said with considerable show of irritation, as if believing it was really his right to stay by the sloop:

"Let Eph take a couple of splinters, one longer than the other, an' he who draws the shortest shall stay behind. I'm not minded to worry over this thing a great while, so s'pose you get to work."

I went into the cabin, where I might make ready for the drawing without chance of being seen, and

when the two fragments of wood were secure in my hand, with no sign about them to show which was the shortest, I came into the cockpit, when Abraham said:

"I would rather cut off one of my fingers than set out for New York while there's a chance that they who are left behind may be in big danger, yet you shall make the first choice, Sam, an' I'll abide by the result without a whimper."

"I'm no more keen to go than are you; but we can't squabble over it all day, so here goes," and, without seeming to look at the bits of wood, Sam drew out one from my hand.

Then I showed the other, and Abe gave a great cry of joy, for Sam held that one which was a full inch longer than the other.

"There's no use cryin' over spilled milk," Abel Grant said, as if he would comfort the disconsolate looking Sam. "If it's danger you're hankerin' for, I'm allowin' that he who goes will run up against it plenty and hard, for who's to say that Luther Stedman, burnin' to get square because of your deliverin' him up as a prisoner, won't guess that, since it's likely we've come here as spies, this same move will be made. It wouldn't need that a man should be overly bright to come to that conclusion, an' you can make up your mind he'd try to cut the messenger off. Besides, with this 'ere fleet so close at hand, the Tories on the island will make matters hot for any Whig who comes their way."

Sam's face brightened as the matter was thus presented, and even before Abel Grant ceased speaking I came to believe that the messenger might be in even more danger than we whom he left behind, for we could put to sea if necessary to avoid

capture, while he must trust wholly to his own legs.

Now that the decision had been made Abel Grant called Sam aft, and pointed out to him this frigate or that sloop-of-war, urging that he so fix in his mind the general appearance of the fleet that he could set before the general a fair idea of what he had seen, and all the while we were drawing nearer and nearer to the lee of Coney Island.

By this time we were so far from the Britishers that there was little chance of being overhauled while we appeared to be honest fishermen seeking a harbor for the night, and it seemed certain that for twelve hours at least we might count on doing very much as pleased us.

During all the time we were running in under the lee of the land Abel Grant continued to talk with Sam, impressing on his mind that portion of the scene which would seem of the most importance to General Putnam, and immediately the anchor had been let go, with the sloop less than fifty yards from the shore, the "admiral" hauled the punt alongside.

"Get hard-tack enough to stay your stomach till mornin', Sam, an' then you'll be where it'll be possible to get food in plenty, or else you won't be needin' overly much."

It seemed to me a brutal way of reminding the lad that there was danger in plenty before him, yet Sam appeared pleased rather than otherwise that his task was to be beset with difficulty, and said hurriedly, while stowing the biscuit under his shirt where they would not hamper his movements:

"Allowin' that I get to New York all right, I shall come straight back here as soon as the gen-

eral can be told of what we've seen, so keep a sharp look-out for me, in case you're cruisin' nearby. I'll show some kind of a signal, if possible; but you can count to a dead certainty that I'll be here inside of three days if I'm alive an' at liberty."

Then the plucky fellow stepped over the rail into the punt, and Abel Grant paddled him ashore without giving us time to say a word of farewell.

Night had fully shut in when the "admiral" came over the rail again, and Abe and I were in the cabin overhauling the generous supply of stores in order to break our long fast.

"Goin' it kind'er strong, eh?" Abel said with a laugh as he saw how much we had laid out for supper. "It strikes me that you've got enough there for a full company of Minute Boys."

"We may as well live high while we can, for there's no tellin' how soon all this stuff will be taken aboard one of the Britishers," Abe replied grimly. "Why did you hurry Sam off so fast? A few minutes more or less couldn't have made any great difference."

"It wasn't the time I wanted to save, but the words," Abel Grant said gravely. "You lads are mixin' yourselves up in real war, when the lives of an hundred, or even a thousand men don't count very heavy, an' it ain't a good plan to talk overly much in the way of sayin' good-bye when a fellow is headin' for a hornet's nest."

"We're the ones who are nearest the hornet's nest." Abe said with a laugh.

"We shall be after Luther Stedman does his work; but for the next four an' twenty hours Sam has got the ticklish job. There ain't a Tory on

Long Island who don't know his father for the hottest kind of a Whig, an', seein' Sam come from this direction, it won't be a very far call to set down his exact business. I only hope he'll pull through all right, an' he's the most foolish kind of a fool if he tries to come back."

Such talk as this was not calculated to make me feel any stouter in mind, and I hastened to change the subject by proposing that the "admiral" fry some salt pork, while I boiled potatoes. Then we squabbled over what should be cooked, finding it difficult amid our plenty to make a selection, until it was almost as if we had forgotten Sam, who was toiling through the underbrush on his way across the island.

It was a veritable feast we had that evening, and we ate like lads who have nothing to fear, trifling with the food after the edge had been taken from our appetites, to the end that we might remain longer over the meal; but it could not be prolonged beyond a certain time, and then came the question of turning in for the night.

Abel Grant insisted on going ashore to have a look seaward before going to sleep, and while he was doing so Abe and I sat in the cabain silent and motionless, each intent on his own thoughts, which were none of the cheeriest.

"There's nothin' to be seen more'n when we dropped anchor," Master Grant reported when he came aboard after an absence of ten minutes or less, "an' I didn't expect that there would be; but we can't afford to shut our eyes altogether. You lads had better turn in, and I'll call you in time to stand your share of the watch."

"What is the need of all that?" I asked irritably, for it seemed much like an excess of precaution while we were so near the shore.

"If I could tell you to a certainty, lad, there wouldn't be a call for any one to stay awake. It's to guard against what we know nothin' about, that the trick's to be done, so turn in while you may."

It seemed to me that I should never be able to close my eyes in slumber while danger was so near at hand, and yet I dare venture to say that within ten minutes I was sleeping as peacefully and as noisily as Abraham.

CHAPTER V.

UNWELCOME VISITORS.

It was as if I had hardly more than lost myself in slumber when I was awakened by Abraham, who announced that the new day would dawn in less than two hours. I insisted that he had made a mistake, still believing I had but just turned in, yet was forced to admit he was right after learning that Abel Grant had remained on watch until nearly midnight, before arousing my comrade.

"It seems like a useless loss of sleep, while everythin' is so quiet, but I'm willin' to admit that Abel Grant knows best," Abraham said as he rolled into his bunk with a little squeak of content.

"Have you seen or heard anythin'?" I asked, rubbing my eyes sleepily as I looked out through the hatch.

"Not so much as the flappin' of a bird's wing. It seems as if, with the wind drawin' down from the fleet, we might hear the cries of the sentries; but nothing has come to my ears. We appear to be snug enough here, an' I only wish we knew Sam was as free from trouble."

Abraham had hardly more than ceased speaking before the sound of loud breathing told that he was asleep, and I stepped softly out on deck in order to let the drowsiness blow from my eyes.

Save for the distant rumble of surf on the outer side of the island, the most profound silence reigned. Far away in the distance could be seen tiny points of light, which I took to be the Britishers' lanterns, but, otherwise than such signs of life, we were apparently as much alone as if in an uninhabited world.

The night breath from the ocean was invigorating, for the previous day had been exceedingly warm, and our little cabin was like unto a furnace. I drew in long draughts of the cool air as I speculated upon what Sam might be doing, and if he had traveled without interruption since leaving us, until having worked myself up to the belief that I had been frightened without cause — that our task of spying upon the enemy's fleet was no more than a pleasure excursion.

And then, when the sense of perfect security had banished all forebodings, there came to my ears a faint sound which caused me to spring to the rail in a listening attitude, every nerve in my body tingling.

The wind had brought a noise as of oars in the distance, and during two or three moments I stood there undecided as to whether I might have been deceived, after which there could no longer be any question.

A boat was coming toward us from the direction of the fleet, and on the instant all the fancied sense of security had vanished, leaving in its stead a vague terror which caused me to tremble violently.

Could it be that Luther Stedman had already given information as to our being ardent Whigs, and the enemy was coming thus soon to take us

into custody as spies? It did not seem reasonable that all this could have been done thus soon, and yet if such was not the case, why was a boat bearing down upon us?

While one might have counted thirty I stood irresolute, asking myself questions that could not be answered, but the reply to which might come all too soon, and then I ran into the cuddy, shaking Abel Grant violently as I whispered:

"The Britishers are comin'! Luther Stedman must have sent them! Turn out, for there's no time to be lost!"

Abel came from the bunk like a steel spring, wide awake, and asking in a puzzled tone:

"What's to be done that time is so precious?"

"That's what I don't know; but we can't allow ourselves to be taken here like rats in a trap!"

I had spoken sufficiently loud to awaken Abraham, who leaped out of his bunk just as Abel Grant went on deck, and, without speaking, we two lads followed him.

It was not needed that we strain our ears overly much, for now the thump of oars in the row-locks came over the water loud, distinct, and sounding in my ears like the knell of doom.

Abel Grant remained silent, listening, until it seemed to me he would never speak, and, unable to control my patience longer, I plucked him by the shirt-sleeve, whispering:

"What *shall* we do? We can't stand here idle while they are comin' so fast!"

"I reckon that's what we'll have to do," Abel replied with that exasperating drawl of his which it seemed was unusually pronounced as if to irritate me. "That boat ain't so near as it seems, for

the surface of the water brings the noise a long distance. The cuddy is the place for us; it would never do to let the Britishers, if so be they are really comin' here, find us waitin' for 'em."

Having thus spoken he went into the cabin, and Abraham and I could do no less than follow, although it seemed to me that it was the most foolish move we could make, and so I told him when we had drawn the hatch lest the sound of our voices should be heard.

"That's a matter of opinion, Ephraim, 'cordin' to my way of thinkin'; but p'rhaps you can tell me what we could say to the Britishers, if they found us waitin' for 'em? In case we were really the honest fishermen we claim to be, what call would there be for standin' watch while anchored here where no harm could come to the sloop if a livin' gale should spring up? Why wouldn't we be sleepin', to be ready for a day's work when the sun rises?"

Abel Grant was right, as he had always contrived to be from the time he adopted us Minute Boys as his own particular following. A blind man could have seen that by thus being on the alert when the Britishers arrived, we would be much the same as advertising the fact that we were fearing they might pay us a visit, and without waiting to see what the others might be counting on doing, I rolled into my bunk.

Abel Grant and Abraham followed my example, and as we lay there pretending to be asleep, with the clanking of the oars sounding louder and louder each moment, my heart beat so fast and furious that involuntarily I held my hand over it.

If the Britishers had come aboard at that mo-

ment, one glance at my face would have been sufficient to show that I was thoroughly afraid; but, luckily, they gave me time to gather my scattered wits sufficiently to understand that unless I was willing to be made a prisoner, it was necessary to control myself.

Ominously sounded the noise of the oars; the suspense was becoming greater each instant, until it was with a feeling of positive relief that I felt the sloop heel over as she was struck amidships, and with the shock came the hail:

"On board there! Turn out, you bloomin' Yankees, an' give an account of yourselves!"

Surely this seemed sufficient proof that Luther Stedman had worked our undoing, but, and it seems strange to me even now, because of the danger which I had feared was close at hand, my courage returned and I was able to follow my comrades when they tumbled out of the cabin with the utmost speed, looking and acting as if scared nearly out of their senses.

"What's up? What's gone wrong? Sheer off, or you'll run us down!" Abel Grant cried shrilly, but not forgetting to lengthen his words until it was as if he pulled them out from between his teeth, and I had no little difficulty in keeping my face straight, so comical did it all appear.

"What are you doing down here?" a stern voice from out the gloom asked, and Abel replied in the most innocent manner possible:

"We was tryin' to bottle up a little sleep; but if you're goin' to cruise 'round so reckless-like, I reckon it stands us in hand to keep our eyes open mighty wide."

"When did you leave New York?" the voice

asked sternly, and I could hear the sailors giggling as if amused by Abel's reply.

"Bless your heart, we don't live in New York. We come out'er Gowanus creek this mornin', countin' to put to sea after bluefish; but a feller on one of the vessels took all our clams, an' now we've got to wait till the tide turns before there'll be a show of gettin' any more."

Then came a few words in a low tone, which I could not catch, and the officer, for such I supposed the man who had done the talking must be, said sharply:

"You'll get under way and follow me."

At the same instant a marine, musket in hand, leaped aboard the sloop, and I understood that we were not to be given an opportunity to disobey; but Abel Grant continued to play his part, by saying in a tone of entreaty:

"Look here, Mister, we can't go foolin' 'round the bay, else we'll lose the tide an' waste a whole day. What do you want us for, any way?"

"Do as you're bidden without making any further talk about it, or I'll take you with me, and send a couple more men aboard to handle your craft."

"But, look here, Mister —"

"Get your anchor, and be lively about it!" the officer cried angrily, and Abel Grant went forward meekly, saying in an undertone to us lads, but yet speaking sufficiently loud to be heard by the Britishers:

"Here I've been makin' a bloomin' fool of myself wishin' the king's ships would come, so's we'd have a chance to sell fish an' jest when we've got the

show to make a few shillin's some fool trick must be played on us!"

The marine was standing stiffly near the tiller when we got our anchor, and if ever sail was made clumsily, it was on the Swiftsure that morning. Abel tumbled here and there; pulled at the main sheet as if believing it was the halliards, and otherwise made such a show of himself that the British seamen could not restrain their mirth, while the officer fired off volley after volley of oaths as a means of quickening his movements.

And all the while that we thus played the simple my heart was as heavy as lead, for I knew full well we were prisoners, even though allowed to remain on board our own vessel, and there was no question in my mind but that all this had been brought about by Luther Stedman and his friend, although I could not quite figure out how it had been done thus quickly.

The only rift of sunshine in all the gloom was the fact that unless Sam came to grief while traveling across Long Island, we would have sent at least one report to General Putnam before thus making a dire failure of the whole venture.

Well, we made sail finally, and, acting under the direction of the officer, followed close in the wake of his boat. The wind was light, being no more than the night breath which comes in over the sea at early morning, and the oarsmen were obliged to row very leisurely otherwise they would speedily have run us out of sight.

The new day was just breaking when we came up with the outermost armed vessel in the fleet, and were ordered to make the sloop fast astern, a

hawser having been passed to us for that purpose.

"You will stay where you are until further orders," the officer said in a pompous tone as he went up the rope-ladder hanging over the ship's side. "The sentry has instructions to shoot without stopping to ask questions, if you make the slightest move toward sneaking off."

"We may as well stay here as under the lee of the island, so long's we've lost the tide," Abel Grant said in a despondent tone, and to us lads he added, "Come inter the cuddy, boys, an' we'll finish our snooze."

The marine had already seated himself in the stern-sheets, where he remained stiff as a poker, his musket held across one arm that it might be brought into use without loss of time, but otherwise looking very comfortable.

"I reckon, neighbor, it won't do any good to ask you to come down an' jine us in our snooze, an' by the same token neither you nor that Britisher with the gold lace are likely to say anythin' agin our takin' what comfort we may?"

"So that you obey orders by layin' here quietly, there is no reason why you should not do whatever you please," the man said gruffly, and yet not without a certain tone of friendliness.

"It strikes me that we can't do anythin' else than obey orders so long as we're made fast to your ship," Abel Grant replied with a laugh as if he viewed the situation in the light of a joke, and then he pulled the hatch over, thus shutting us out from view of those on the ship, as well as the marine.

When this had been done, we three came close to-

gether, as far forward as possible, and Abel said in a whisper:

"I'm allowin', lads, that this 'ere is the end of our cruise. If we hadn't been sich fools as to take all these stores aboard, then there might be some chance of carryin' out the game of bein' honest fishermen, providin' Luther Stedman don't show up. But as it is, once one of them Britishers comes below, he'll see that we're outfitted for a longer voyage than a day's fishin'."

"Isn't there somethin' we can do to give 'em the slip?" Abe asked hopefully.

"I leave it to you to say what that may be, an' stand ready to jine in anythin' that promises half a chance; but with the marine aboard, an' the sentries on the ship ready to fire at the first show of tryin' to get away, I can't understand how we'll be able to make a move."

"And if Luther Stedman should come to say we are Whigs, who took him and his friend prisoners, what then?" I asked.

"Well, I reckon we'll have a taste of prison life aboard a British vessel, an' I'm told it ain't at all comfortable," Abel Grant said seriously. "Look here, the one thing to be done is to keep our upper lips stiff. We're in a box where there ain't much chance for backin' out, an' the only thing left is to show the bloomin' Britishers that we're no cowards. I shall stick to the story that we had nothin' more in mind than a day's fishin', even if Luther Stedman stands in front of me. It ain't what you might call real lyin', an' even if it was, I'll allow that we'd be warranted in it, seein's this is mighty serious, an' we are servin' the Cause."

Having thus shown us that he did not indulge in any hope of escape, Abel Grant crawled into one of the bunks as if it was his purpose to go to sleep; but Abraham and I sat there on the locker, holding each other by the hand, two as disheartened lads as could have been found in all the colonies.

We had dreamed of being able to do men's work in this fight for liberty, and yet had come to grief before really beginning the first task set us. The only ray of comfort I could see in all the wretched business was, that it had been brought about through no fault of ours. We had simply obeyed orders, and in the obeying had come to a prison.

How long we two sat there side by side, leaning one against the other as if the friendly contact strengthened our courage, I cannot say. Surely it must have been an hour, and during all that time Abel Grant remained motionless, even more silent than if he had really been asleep.

Then it was that an unusual movement of the sloop told us the marine had changed position, and an instant later we heard him crying to some of his comrades on the ship:

"Pass me down some oil-skins, will you? There is no need of gettin' soaked through, even though I am forced to stand guard over a lot of bloomin' colonists."

"Why does he want oil-skins?" Abel Grant muttered, and then in the dim light of the cuddy I could see him creeping toward the hatchway.

A moment later he stole softly back to where we were sitting, and whispered excitedly:

"Lads, there's as thick a fog smother come in from sea as I ever looked at, an' who knows but that it's our one chance?"

"Chance for what?" I whispered irritably. "How can we do anythin' while that red-coated marine sits aft with his musket ready to shoot us if we happen to show ourselves in a way that doesn't happen to please him?"

"I ain't jest certain how the trick may be worked; but with everythin' shut in by the smother, it seems as if we might turn it to our advantage. I reckon it's best we don't make overly much talk here, for if the marine hears us whisperin' he'll guess, unless his head is thicker than I allow for, that we've got some scheme afoot."

So far as I could judge, it made little difference whether he suspected anything or not, for surely so long as we were made fast to the ship, and he remained aboard to see that we did not attempt to change the position of affairs, we were powerless.

After sitting still while one might have counted twenty, Abel whispered to me that I was to open the hatch, and stand at the head of the cuddy stairs talking on whatsoever subject came to my mind, with himself and Abraham, regardless of what answers they might make.

"It's just to show yourself, an' see to it that the bloomin' marine don't get overly suspicious," he said in conclusion, and then began crawling over the stores into the very forepeak of the sloop.

Wondering what sort of a plan he might have in mind when it seemed certain none could avail us, but yet knowing that he must have settled upon something, I obeyed, opening the hatch only so far as was needed in order to peer out, when I saw that there could be no mistake as to the fog storm.

Never had I known the gray vapor so dense; turning my head I could see only dimly the outlines of

the ship, astern of which we rode within fifteen or twenty yards, and despite the gravity of the situation I could not have restrained myself from smiling at the disconsolate figure of the marine who, enveloped in oil-skins, was humped up in the stern-sheets as forlorn a royalist spectacle as a Whig could possibly wish to see.

"I reckon we haven't lost anythin' by bein' forced to tail on behind your vessel," I said in a friendly tone, thinking it was as well to enter into conversation with the guard as with my comrades. "In this smother there'll be no fishin', an' even if we had put out, it would be a case of gettin' back under the lee of the island again."

"I wish you an' all the bloomin' colonists in this blasted country had been sunk before ever I enlisted to come over here an' show you your duty to the king," the marine growled, wiping off the drops of water which were trickling down his nose, with the sleeve of his coat.

"Well, there's one thing about it," I said laughingly, and if anything could give a fellow comfort it was the picture of that unhappy lobster-back, "we colonists didn't ask you to come, an' would have been well content had you staid at home, if this is the way we're to be used."

"I can't see but what you are havin' the best of this business," he growled.

"In what way?"

"You can stay snug in the cabin while I'm under orders to sit here with this blasted fog drenchin' the life out of me."

"Why don't you come below?"

"Because my orders were to stay here."

Thinking I had talked long enough with the ma-

rine, I bent down to speak with Abraham, and that which I could dimly see caused so much surprise that my tongue absolutely refused to wag. And yet there was nothing particularly terrifying or astonishing in the scene, for it was made up only of Abel Grant's boots; but they were stretched at full length along the narrow space which, in a larger vessel, would have been called a forepeak.

In a twinkling I understood his purpose as well as if he had explained it in so many words.

In the deck, at the heel of the bowsprit, we had, when building the sloop, put in a small hatch to the end that a hawser might be stowed below when we were riding to the anchor at short range, and this hatch gave, as a matter of course, directly upon the bitts, to which were attached a rope that held us to the British vessel.

Abel Grant had conceived the idea of slipping this hawser by reaching up through the small aperture, and if it might be done without his hands being seen, which was a slight risk while the fog was so dense, then would the sloop be adrift. Five minutes afterward, with the tide on the ebb as it was, we should be so far astern that unless they came to seek us in a boat, we were free; but, and here I could see the defect in our "admiral's" scheme, the marine would still be on board, and armed. However, despite the risk, for with a single shot those on the ship might have sunk our sloop off hand, it was a chance well worth the taking. I had so far regained my courage as to mentally snap my fingers at the remainder of the plan, trusting that Abel Grant had head enough to carry it through successfully.

Now it was that I advanced one step up on the

stairs, speaking again to the marine, and this time regarding the possibility that the fog might linger several days before lifting; but all the while watching out of the tail of my eye at that point just forward of the mainmast, where should be seen Abel Grant's hand.

Twice I thought I detected it, and it required all my strength of will to keep up the conversation with the marine, who answered curtly, his temper too far gone to admit of finding any amusement in conversing with a "blasted Yankee."

And then it seemed to me that Abel must have abandoned his purpose, for I saw no movement whatsoever until dimly there came within my line of vision that which was like unto a dark snake, wriggling slowly over the bow. Then a light splash in the water, so light that amid the lip, lip, lipping of the waves one could hardly have detected it, and my heart came into my throat with a bound, for I knew that the sloop was adrift.

The marine, his cap pulled down over his eyes, contented himself with watching the door of the cuddy with the idea that no mischief could be done while we remained below, and consequently he failed to note that the outlines of the ship, so indistinct in the fog, were rapidly melting away, until finally nothing could be seen save that gray wall of vapor.

From the deck of the Britisher I question if at any time since the fog had shut in, our sloop could be seen because of lying so low on the water and being such a small object, therefore were the chances much in our favor that the sentries on the frigate were unaware of what was taking place.

In the cuddy below I could hear some one moving about softly, and understood that Abel Grant was coming back from the forepeak, his work having been done, and done successfully.

An instant later he thrust his head out the hatchway by the side of mine, asking in a sleepy tone:

"Are there any signs of this smother thinnin' up, lad?"

"It's growin' thicker than ever," I replied. "How is the wind?"

"A little west of south, I reckon, what there is of it, an' comin' from that point you can't expect fair weather yet a while. Say, this is a little the toughest I've ever struck on the Long Island shore, an' I'm hopin' I shan't see the like agin'."

While Abel was speaking I heard Abraham moving softly around just below me, and a moment later felt some hard object against my back as Abel Grant apparently reached out his hand and seized it. For a moment I was at a loss to understand what it might be, and then came the thought that our "admiral" was making ready to take care of the marine in the stern-sheets, if peradventure the thick-headed Britisher came to suspect that all was not exactly as it should be. Abraham had passed him the musket, but whether it was loaded or not I could not say. The chances were that my comrades had not stopped to so far make their preparations.

Then Abel pulled at my jacket from behind, looking into my face in a meaning way, and I, understanding that he desired me to give way for him, stepped back into the cuddy, saying as I did so:

"If you find any sport standin' out there in the

fog, you may soak yourself, for all I care. I'll take my trick in your bunk."

Abraham was standing in the center of the cabin with a spare tiller in his hand, and again I understood all the plan without need of words.

Abel Grant had sent me below in order that he might not be hampered in his movements if it became necessary to suddenly spring upon the marine, and Abraham with his oaken club was ready to follow at the first signal, which would not be given until there was evidence that the Britishers had discovered the trick.

Now it was simply a question of waiting, and this to me was the most difficult of all, even though I knew full well that every moment increased our chances of escape, for the tide was steadily setting us eastward, and the wind, such as it was, would be forcing the sloop in the direction of Coney Island, although I allowed we would be well out to sea before we came off the land, in case we drifted so far without interruption.

The great fear in my mind was that those on board the frigate would discover too soon what had been done, and yet I asked myself how they could, for the sloop had been shut out from view by the fog before Abel Grant let slip the cable. It would only happen if some overly curious one should pull in on the hawser, and there was little chance in such a smother, for the fog was so dense that it was like unto a storm of rain, that any one on board the frigate would be loitering outside, save while absolutely on duty.

Take it all in all, I believed that Abel Grant had the same as succeeded in his purpose, and yet so great was my anxiety that I trembled like a leaf,

"'MOVE EVER SO LITTLE, AN' I'LL PUT A BALL THROUGH YOUR HEAD!'"

and was forced to sit down on the locker, otherwise my knees would have given way beneath me.

Abraham Decker stood like a statue immediately behind Abel, on whom he kept his eyes fixed that not the slightest movement of our leader should escape him, and thus we remained, no one may say how long.

As some relief from the mental strain I began to count the seconds, with the idea of getting some little knowledge of the passage of time; but even that was impossible while my mind was in such a turmoil.

It may have been two hours for aught I know, and I would dare swear that it was more than half an hour, when I heard the marine say in a startled tone:

"Where is that blasted frigate?"

Abel Grant bounded out onto the deck like a ball of rubber, Abraham following at his heels, and on the instant came the words in a low tone:

"Move ever so little, an' I'll put a ball through your head! Hold your peace, an' no harm shall come to you!"

By this time I was at the cuddy entrance and saw Abel standing with the muzzle of his musket pressed against the marine's ear, while Abraham faced him with uplifted club.

"I reckon we were out of earshot long before this, lads, an' now it is only a question of makin' certain this lobster-back don't raise his voice, thereby obligin' me to blow out what few brains he's got. Give us your cap, Eph. No, I can't take it 'cause this 'ere musket is goin' to stay right where it is. Chuck it in his mouth, an', Abraham, you are to take charge of his gun."

The Britisher showed good sound sense when he resigned himself to the inevitable. He must have known beyond a peradventure that we were desperate, and would not hesitate to carry out any threat which had been made, therefore he opened his mouth meekly at the same time that Abraham took the musket from his hands, and we soon had him gagged.

Now Abel Grant lowered his weapon and at the same time took up the end of the main sheet, making two or three turns around the Britisher's head in such a manner that my cap was held firmly in place as a gag. We had wiped the marine out of the problem, and now came the question as to whether there was seamanship enough among us to finish that which had been so well begun.

"We won't be in any great haste about making sail," Abel Grant said in a whisper. "First and foremost we'll get this lobster-back into the cuddy; lash him up where he can't move, an' that done, I'm allowin' we'd best drift a full hour, unless we hear some token from the frigate, seein's how the current and the wind are both workin' our way."

With three of us to truss up the prisoner the task was not a long one, more particularly since he offered no resistance whatever, but resigned himself entirely to our will, and because of such resignation we treated him with more of tenderness than I had ever believed I could show toward one who wore a red coat.

He was bundled into a bunk with a bit of spare canvas under his head for a pillow, and we three stood in the cockpit together, straining our ears to listen for some token from the frigate which should tell that the escape was discovered.

Then it was that I thought to ask of Abel Grant a question:

"Was your musket loaded?"

"Never a bit of it," he replied with a grin; "but the lobster-back didn't know that."

CHAPTER VI.

THE PRISONER.

WHEN, as nearly as we could guess, an hour passed and nothing had been heard betokening pursuit, we on the sloop were in the best of spirits, for, even though a short time before escape had seemed absolutely impossible, it was certain we had shaken off our captors — as Abraham said triumphantly, we had pulled wool over the eyes of the entire British fleet.

"Now do I hope that Luther Stedman and his big friend were the ones who gave information concernin' us!" the lad said with a loud laugh, as if it delighted him to hear the sound of his own voice once more. "They counted on jeerin' at us when we were in the frigate's prison, an' now we are the ones who can do the crowin'."

"Ay, when we shall be actually free," I added. "Just now the enemy's fleet lies between us and our friends, and the question is how we are to get past them, for I'm allowin' that neither you nor Abel count on our cruisin' 'round at sea, even though we do happen to have provisions for a long voyage."

"It's enough for me that we have slipped off so nicely, when it was believed we were as helpless as rats in a trap," and again Abraham gave himself up to mirth.

"Why not make it a bit more easy for the lobster-back?" I asked, suddenly realizing that our prisoner must be absolutely suffering, bound and gagged as he was.

"Would he do the same for us?" and now Abraham's expression was one of sternness.

"As to that we need not speculate," I replied sternly. "When there is no need to cause suffering, he who permits it is much the same as a brute."

"I reckon Ephraim is in the right," Abel Grant said decidedly. "We can well afford to ease up on the fellow a bit, so s'posen you take out the gag, Eph? We'll leave him trussed as he is a spell longer; but it is well to give his jaws a rest."

I lost no time in acting upon the permission, for it was nothing less since we looked upon Abel as the leader, and when the gag had been removed, I said to the fellow:

"We had to do this, else you would have given an alarm; but we don't count on puttin' you to any more pain than is absolutely necessary."

"I suppose you are well clear of the fleet?" he asked as soon as his jaws were limbered sufficiently to admit of his speaking.

"Ay, there seems to be no doubt as to that."

"I'd like to know how it was done, an' there can be no harm in tellin' that much now."

"Not a bit of it," and in a few words I gave him the key to the whole scheme.

"It was a bloomin' good trick," he said as if it pleased him to know that we had succeeded. "I've heard it said that you Yankees wasn't overly quick-witted; but if this gang can hoodwink his majesty's crack officers, I reckon you'll get along all right. What's to be done now?"

"That is somethin' to be decided on later," I replied with a laugh, and running on deck I put the same question to Abel Grant, who, with the aid of Abraham, was making sail.

Instead of replying, he in turn put a question:

"Is this 'ere sloop a good sea-boat? Meanin' by that, would you trust her in heavy weather outside?"

"Ay, she'll stand up where many another craft would be smothered," I replied proudly, for I had every confidence in the sailorly qualities of the Swiftsure. "But what has that to do with it?"

"How would you like to go back to New York an' report at headquarters with a prisoner in tow?" he asked with a grin, and, failing of understanding what he was driving at, I said with somewhat of impatience:

"If you've somethin' in mind of moment, don't beat about the bush like a simple; but when you talk of takin' prisoners to New York, it's a waste of time. I'm not minded to make any try at crossin' Long Island with the lobster-back, for I reckon that's what you mean. There isn't a Tory whom we'd meet, an' you well know how thick they are thereabouts, who wouldn't raise a hue and cry once it was seen what we were up to. Even as it is, I'm thinkin' we shall have to say good-bye to the sloop, an' take the poor chances of followin' in Sam's footsteps."

By this time the little craft had steerage way on, and Abel took the tiller, saying half to himself as he did so, but still wearing the same grin of satisfaction:

"It's a case of guessin' at the best; but I'm allowin' we shan't go so far astray as to run aground,

for unless I'm way out'er my reckonin', we should be well at sea by this time." Then he added, looking at me, "So you've allowed that we're called upon to abandon the sloop, an' take our chances of crossin' Long Island, where three men out of every four we may come across can surely be counted as enemies, eh?"

"What other course is left? Surely you're not wild enough to think we stand any chance of gettin' past the whole British fleet without bein' captured?"

"Not a bit of it, lad," and now he grinned in a manner that provoked me sorely. "I don't allow there's the man livin' who could put this 'ere sloop past all them Britishers without bein' overhauled, an' I'm dead certain we couldn't do it, for by this time, if so be the bloomin' lobster-backs have found out we're missin', every man jack of 'em is watchin' for us. The way we gave 'em the slip is well calculated to rile all hands quite considerable."

"Then why did you ask such foolish questions?" and now I spoke sharply.

"Because I ain't willin' to say that in order to get back to New York we have got to go up through the Narrows. There is such a thing as a sailin' clean around Long Island, ain't there? It would make quite a cruise, I'll admit; but, 'cordin' to the way I look at the thing, it's a long bit ahead of stickin' our noses where we know we can't get through, an' I'll allow we'd have pretty nigh as much trouble in crossin' the island on foot, as in tryin' to sail up the bay."

I could have kicked myself with a right good will for not having realized before that there was a way out of our difficulties. It had been so

strongly impressed on my mind that we were entirely cut off from our friends, that there was no room for any other thought; but now Abel Grant had made the suggestion, I could see clearly how it might be done, at the expense of time, and was ready to shout for very joy until there came to me a remembrance of Sam.

If so be he succeeded in making his report at headquarters, we knew full well from what the lad had said that he would at once retrace his steps with the idea of joining us, and by thus shaping the course for Montauk Point, we would be in a certain sense deserting him. I said as much to Abel, and it appeared that he was prepared for some such objection, for he replied promptly:

"Well, an' supposin' we make up our minds that we won't desert him? That we'll hang 'round here waitin' for him, what then? Have you got any keen idea as to what will happen when this fog lifts, if so be we're nosin' round Long Island?"

"The Britishers will pick us up in a twinklin'," I said bitterly.

"Ay, so they will, an' how much better off would Sam be if we were in the hands of the enemy? The whole amount of the story, as I look at it, is that we must put him out of our reckonin' entirely, an' a right good job it will be so far as he's concerned. Allow that he got into New York safe, which ain't any sure thing, there's big chances agin his gettin' back to Long Island, an' even if he succeeds, it may be a week before he shows up. This 'ere business, Ephraim Lyttle, is war, an' however fast comrades we may be with a fellow, his safety must not stand in the way of our duty."

He would have been a simple who did not realize

the force of Abel Grant's reasoning, and without spending very much time in thought I understood that, so far as our movements were concerned, it must be as if Sam had never had an existence. We were bound to get back among our friends, if possible, and to do other than had been suggested was, to my mind, the same as voluntarily going aboard one of the British ships as prisoners.

"It will be a big thing," I said half to myself, "if we show up at home with a prisoner, an' as soon as the fog lifts I'm allowin' we had better make an attempt."

"We are making it now, lad," Abel said with another grin; but this time it did not irritate me, and Abraham laughed aloud in glee because I had not understood that we were already on the voyage before my opinion was asked. "I'm headin' her by guesswork along the line of the island, an' that's as nigh as any man could come to it in this smother, however good a navigator he might be. It's a case of trustin' to luck, with the only chance agin us that we may make more to the eastward than is needed."

A grand scheme it was, this of Abel Grant's, and I pictured to myself the credit which we would gain, if, after having been captured by the frigate, we showed our heels, and in addition brought away the man who had been set as guard over us.

Well, we had our time of crowing then, even though the fact had not been accomplished, and so enjoyed ourselves with such counting of our chickens before they were hatched, that all thought of any immediate danger from the Britishers faded from my mind.

Abel Grant counted it as positive that none of the

enemy's ships would be moving while the fog was so dense; therefore our chances of coming upon one while it was hove to, or at anchor, was mighty slim, and such a mishap it should be possible for us to avoid.

If the wind held favorable the cruise would not be an exceeding long one, and, so far as I could make out, the greatest risk we ran was in failing to arrive in time to be of service, for surely after such a force had assembled in the lower bay there could be no question but that the Britishers intended to give speedy battle.

We discussed the situation in all its bearings as the Swiftsure plowed her way through the fog, and over a sea that, save for the long swell, was comparatively smooth, and then it occurred to Abraham that it was high time we had breakfast.

"You an' I will have to be cooks, Eph, now that Sam's gone, for the admiral can't be spared from the helm, so let's get about the job."

We went below to overhaul the stores once more, and there, as a matter of course, saw our prisoner, who must have suffered not a little because of the inability to change his position ever so little, owing to the ropes with which he was completely swaddled.

"I could not help hearin' what you said, lads, but don't fancy any harm's done because I played the part of listener. You'll do the trick all right, I'm thinkin', an' although it ain't in any ways pleasant for me, I can't help lookin' at it as a neat turn. Do you count on my stayin' here trussed up like a chicken ready for the roastin', all the while?"

I had not before thought of that part of the plan. We might be a full week in making the voyage, and

surely the lobster-back, unless he turned rusty, would be suffering more than was needed.

"I am wonderin' whether my comrades would be willin' to allow you the freedom of the ship, if you take a solemn oath not to try to get away," I said as much for the marine's benefit as for Abe's, for I wanted to see how he took the suggestion.

"Well, I'm countin' myself a prisoner of war, so you can't make anythin' more out of me, an' as such, fair treatment is my due. Now since there's no way for me to better my position, why shouldn't I do as many a better a man has before me, and surrender, lock, stock an' barrel."

"What do you say, Abe?" I asked of my comrade, who was apparently still deeply intent on overhauling the stores.

"We surely can't keep him trussed up as he is all the while we are runnin' 'round Long Island, an' with his word for it, seein' that we are three to one in case he tries to make trouble, I believe in actin' half-way decent. Ask Abel what he thinks about it?"

"I have been hearin' all that tongue-waggin'," the man at the helm cried in a jovial tone, "an' reckon you can do no better than cast the lobster-back loose, after he has given his solemn word to behave himself 'cordin' to our ideas."

"I solemnly swear to raise no hand in my own behalf in case you are overhauled by the British forces, and to make no attempt whatsoever at escaping until after you shall have delivered me into the hands of your people," the man said gravely, and in a tone which convinced me he firmly intended to keep his word; but Abe, not being quite satisfied with the form of the parole, added:

"To boil it down, you mean that you'll swear to stick by us as if you was a comrade until we strike New York, an' have parted at headquarters, or wheresoever we may be ordered to leave you?"

"I swear it," the man replied, whereupon I began loosening his bonds, and that the poor fellow had suffered not a little by being thus held in one position so long, could be seen when it became absolutely necessary for him to chafe his limbs vigorously before it was possible to use them.

Having thus formerly surrendered himself as a prisoner of war, the lobster-back proved to be a very companionable fellow, and before he had been at liberty an hour I found myself wondering how so decent, so cheery, and so seemingly friendly a man could have had it in his heart to take part in depriving the American colonists of their rights or their lives.

It was while Abe and I were making ready a sumptuous meal, I slicing the salt pork while Abraham was frying ship's biscuit, that I put into words for the Britisher's benefit, the thoughts which had been in my mind, and it was after this fashion that he made answer:

"I did not enlist to deprive any man of his rights, an', once enlisted, it did not come within my line of duty to question whether the king was actin' justly or unjustly. The English Government has said that you colonists must do certain things, an' you've allowed that you won't; it's what you might call a family quarrel, an' we who are servin' his majesty haven't any personal feelin' in the matter, more than a constable might have who was called in by a father to check a row between children."

"Are you meaning to say that the king stands

to us of the colonies like a father?" Abraham asked with no little heat, and the Britisher replied with a laugh:

"I don't see how else you can put it. It wasn't so long ago when all hands of you were English, an' lookin' to England for whatsoever was needed. Now a difference of opinion has come up. Of course you claim to be in the right, an' I allow the king is claimin' the same thing; however, you won't give him credit for anythin' except tryin' to grind you down. So far as the outcome of this 'ere trouble is concerned, I don't care a farthin' either way; but I'm puttin' it to you, lads, that if you'd taken the king's shillin' an' sworn to serve him, whether you wouldn't do so accordin' to the best of your abilities? We of the rank and file are doin' just the same as you lads would, in case there was a riot in New York, let us say, an' the officers of your army told you to turn to an' help put down the rioters. Wouldn't you do it? Of course you would, unless you were blasted duffers. You see, it is altogether owing to which side you're on, that puts a different color to the business. Just now I'm a prisoner of war, an' can't for the life of me see why we shouldn't be just as chummy, until my parole has come to an end, as if there'd never been any trouble betwixt the king and the colonists."

"You seem to be a pretty decent sort of a fellow," came the voice of the "admiral," "an' I'm allowin' you've put the thing pretty near right, though of course we are lookin' on you as an enemy. Come out here an' let's you an' I have a blow-off over this 'ere question, to see if I can persuade you to turn 'round an' be honest once more."

The man went into the cockpit laughing, and I heard him say when he got there:

"An' what chance would me and my mates have in tryin' to talk you into turnin' against them as you have sworn to obey?"

"Mighty little, an' that's a fact," Abel Grant replied.

"Then don't think I'm pig-headed if you can't twist me around your finger."

I looked out into the cockpit and saw the Britisher filling Abel's pipe for him, the two behaving toward each other as if they had long been cronies, and, calling Abraham's attention to the scene, I said, regretting that it might not be:

"If we could come at all the lobster-backs whom the king has sent over here, in the same manner we have our prisoner, there wouldn't be much of a war, I'm thinkin'."

"Ay, in that you are right, Eph, for if we came at 'em in the same manner they'd all have been our prisoners, consequently, there wouldn't be anybody left to fight against us. It strikes me, however, that just now instead of talking politics, you an' I had better get this grub cooked, for if Abel and the lobster-back are as hungry as I am, they'll soon be after us with a sharp stick for sogering."

I wish I might be able to go into all the details of that voyage which lasted throughout five full days, setting down accurately all we said and did while hob-nobbing with the lobster-back, for that was really what we did do. The fellow showed himself to be so companionable, and with such a fund of good nature, that however brutal we may have wanted to treat him, it would have been impossible.

He was more like a friend than an enemy, and seemingly as eager for the success of our venture as if his whole heart was bound up in the Cause.

"Why should I feel otherwise," he said one day, when I taxed him with disloyalty to the king in thus being eager for our success. "Accordin' to the way I look at it, being a prisoner of war on parole, I'm neither fish, flesh nor fowl, an' being deprived by my oath of doin' that which is my duty, why isn't it natural I'd like to see three plucky fellows, who have done an amazin' good turn, as I look at it, succeed in their venture?"

"But if we failed you would regain your liberty," Abel suggested, and the Britisher replied with a laugh:

"Perhaps I am not so eager at goin' back to duty on board ship when I am comfortably fixed here, an' with jolly companions."

And indeed the lobster-back gave every evidence of having spoken the truth, for if ever a man enjoyed himself he was that one, taking his trick at the wheel, or, when not engaged in some odd job about the sloop, lying at full length on the cockpit floor, smoking, or getting an extra "forty winks" in the cuddy.

"By the time this 'ere craft makes Bowlin' Green in New York, I allow he'll be so near a Yankee as to go runnin' 'round Long Island huntin' for a piece of land that can be bought cheap, so's to go to farmin'," Abel Grant said laughingly, and perhaps at this point I should say that the Britisher had given his name as "Seth Hartley."

"But in case of bein' overhauled before we get there, perhaps I have come so near makin' Tories out of you that all hands will be throwin' up their

hats shoutin' for the king," the prisoner replied, and there was hardly an hour in the day when he and Abel Grant did not exchange some such remarks as these.

During the first eight and forty hours after taking leave of the frigate without going through any very formal ceremony, the fog enveloped everything so completely that we never had a glimpse of the land, although often hearing the roar of the breakers on the shore, nor, as a matter of course, did we sight a vessel.

It was on the morning of the third day out that we got a shock which was much like receiving a bucket full of cold water suddenly on one's bare flesh, for then, as the fog thinned, not more than half a mile to the eastward was an armed vessel flying British colors, and Seth Hartley set her down as a transport lately come from Boston. The wind was light; the Swiftsure was making hardly more than two miles an hour, and if so be the officers of the stranger desired to overhaul us, it would only have been necessary to send out a boat with no more than two pairs of oars, when we would have been at their mercy.

"I'm thinkin' she'll want to know who you are," the prisoner said thoughtfully, as if surveying the craft, and I, watching him intently, could not see any show of joy in his face at the idea that his friends might soon be our captors.

"If so be she's come from Boston, I'm allowin' we can tell a decently good yarn," Abel Grant said as if in reply; but the expression of anxiety on his face told that he was far from being as confident as his words would imply.

"If we claim to be fishermen, they might insist

on taking us aboard to act as pilots," Abraham suggested, and our prisoner added:

"I'm thinkin' if you get into trouble through her, that's about the way the trick will be done, unless she's one of the fleet which has put out in search for you, which I much misdoubt."

Then we fell silent, every man jack of us, including Seth Hartley, watching intently the ship which appeared to be hardly moving through the water, and it soon became apparent to all that unless the wind strengthened speedily, we would be carried by the current well within hail of the Britisher.

"I'm thinkin' we shall have to do a bit of tongue-waggin' in this 'ere case whether he wants a pilot or not," Abel Grant said apprehensively, and then added quickly to the prisoner, who had discarded his military coat and stock because of the heat, "Perhaps you had better get into the cuddy, Seth, an' lay low, for if any aboard that ship should happen to get a bit of your cockney speech, they'd allow you was a deserter, an' you couldn't persuade 'em we'd picked you out of the king's fleet as a prisoner."

"I'm thinkin' you wouldn't spend overly much time tryin' to do that," the Britisher said with a laugh, and then went obediently below.

Half an hour later we were so near the ship as to hear distinctly the hail which came from her, and when Abel replied to it with his lazy drawl, the question was asked:

"Where do you hail from?"

"Montauk Point."

"Do you know the water about Sandy Hook?"

"Nothing more than that there's plenty of it.

We wouldn't be up the coast so far if it hadn't been for losin' our way in the fog."

"Have you got any fresh fish aboard?"

"One of the king's vessels took from us all the clams we had for bait, and we was makin' our way back to port when we got mixed in with this smother."

I was literally trembling with apprehension lest the next words should be an order for us to come alongside and show ourselves, therefore was the disappointment a happy one when he who had hailed us turned squarely about and resumed his pacing of the quarter deck, as if thinking us not of sufficient consequence to spend any more time with.

We were too near the British vessel to give words to the joy which was ours at escaping thus easily, and during the half hour we were forced to remain within hail no conversation was indulged in, lest we should let slip inadvertently some word which might excite the curiosity of the enemy.

Before nightfall we rounded Montauk Point; every trace of the fog had disappeared, and we had the wind abeam, with plenty of it for a run up the sound, which, as can well be imagined, was much to our liking.

The marine had come out of the cabin long since, and we four laughed and chatted gleefully, even the prisoner seeming to be overjoyed because now was the time when it seemed positive we should make New York without hindrance unless, peradventure, the British fleet had anchored directly off the city.

The cruise was not to be ended so soon, however, although we came to learn that all danger, save it might be from Tories, had been passed. The wind flattened down into a dead calm before mid-

night, and it was not until the afternoon of the fifth day that we came within sight of that town we so ardently desired to reach.

"We will be off Bowlin' Green within two hours after sunset," Abel Grant announced confidently, and then, turning to our prisoner, he asked abruptly, "Well, Seth, what do you allow? That you'll go into prison?"

"Well, I shouldn't do it from choice; but do you see any other road out of it, seein's how I've been lawfully taken a prize?"

"There's only this way that I can figure, an' I've done a heap of thinkin' on the matter since you showed yourself to be a right decent kind of a man — the first decent one I have ever heard tell of who wore a red coat."

"It's what the man's got inside of him, not that which he has on his back, that makes or mars him," our prisoner said seriously; "but what is it you have figured out concernin' me?"

"Well, I don't know how it may strike you; but I am wantin' that you believe I am doin' it in the way of bein' friendly," Abel Grant said, speaking slowly, and now I understood that that which was to follow would be of considerable importance. "If so be you didn't give back your parole, you'd kind'er feel it your duty to hang to the oath you took, eh?"

"My parole was only to last until you delivered me to the officers of the American Army?"

"Ay, that's as we understand it. Now, supposin' we didn't deliver you? Wouldn't the oath you took hold?"

Seth looked puzzled, and even I who had an inkling of what our "admiral" was driving at, failed to understand, seeing which he continued:

"This 'ere gang that you've fallen in with, countin' another that we've spoken of, meanin' Sam, are a full regiment an' a fleet, with this 'ere sloop as the only ship. Now I ain't tryin' to bring you 'round to our way of thinkin'; but I've got an idee from words you've let drop now an' then, that you ain't overly keen on fightin' us. If that should be the case, I'm wonderin' why you couldn't stay right here on the sloop with me, for I ain't enlisted to do shore duty, an' then we'd always have a prisoner to fall back on when we got to feelin' savage agin anythin', an' wanted to kick somebody."

"Meanin' that you'd have me stay here willingly?"

"Nothin' of the kind. I'm just askin' how it would strike you if we didn't put an end to your parole, bindin' you to hold your tongue as to what you might have seen and heard while in our company, if it so be your friends should re-capture you? You're not to be asked to fight for the colonies against George III; but to kind'er loaf 'round as a general deck-hand, farin' as we fare, an' bein' the same decent kind of a fellow that we've known these five days."

Abraham and I had come to know Seth Hartley so well that neither of us felt the slightest hesitation in endorsing this proposition of Abel Grant's, although I had many misgivings as to what Lieutenant Winterbottom might say, if he knew that we had as comrade aboard the sloop a British marine whom we had captured.

However, this last part of it did not trouble me very deeply; I believed we would be doing nothing wrong against the Cause if we should keep him with us as a comrade, and surely the king's forces in

America would be lessened by one man, which might not be any great loss to his majesty, and yet every arm in the struggle such as was seemingly before us of the colonies, counted.

Perhaps if Seth Hartley had been eager to accept the offer made, and had said without hesitation that he would be glad to do as we proposed, I might at a future time have had doubts regarding his loyalty to us; but as it was he hung in the wind, apparently considering the matter from every point, and finally said:

"I'll give you my answer before we come to anchor; but whether I take up with the offer or not, I want you to understand that I'm thankin' you for it. It's an honor you've done me, an' I'm proud to know you believe I'd deal honestly by all hands, whatever turned up. Of course, seein' I'm a prisoner, the bargain is all in my favor, but I'm not considerin' that for a minute."

CHAPTER VII.

MAKING READY FOR A BATTLE.

WHILE I was ready, and even eager, to welcome the Britisher as a comrade, with never a question that he would make any attempt to play us false, I would have been the veriest simple if I failed to understand in what an odd light the Minute Boys of Long Island would thus be placed.

We would, by those who were informed of the facts, be credited with having taken into the ranks one of the enemy who still held himself bound to the king, because of having voluntarily enlisted, and of enrolling a member who could not fight with us in event of our being called on to do soldiers' duty. It is true Abel Grant had proposed only that the Britisher should aid in sailing the sloop; but at the same time he would be counted as a comrade, and we would be exceedingly glad to welcome him as such.

Again, and this came into my mind while Seth Hartley sat amidships evidently trying to settle the matter in some way which would not do violence to his conscience, by enlisting him as had been suggested, we would, perhaps, lose the triumph and honor which might have been ours had we presented ourselves with a prisoner to be turned over to the military authorities, and this was no slight loss, as I viewed the matter.

However, both Abraham Decker and I had cheerfully agreed to the proposition made by our "admiral," and it was too late now to protest, even though we might be so inclined.

The Britisher remained silent and motionless while we eagerly discussed among ourselves the possible movements of the king's fleet, for a full hour, and then he raised his head suddenly, in a manner which told that he had arrived at some decision.

"Well, what is it?" I asked laughingly, for my heart was exceeding light now that we were come out of our dangerous venture in such good shape.

"I have agreed with myself that I will have done no real wrong if I admit that the parole shall hold good until such time as pleases you. The greatest fear that has been in my mind is as to whether the day may not come when, if you meet with disaster, I shall be credited with havin' brought it about. And so it is that I am askin' you to say solemnly if it is certain you can trust me? If you do, then I'm also puttin' it as a favor that you won't talk military secrets before me; not that there's any fear on my part of bein' tempted to betray you, but so you may feel more sure I can't do you a wrong."

"That part of it is all right, matey," Abel Grant replied quickly, as if he was the only member of the party who had the right to be considered. "We haven't lived with you these five days without gettin' a mighty good idee of the stuff you're made of. I'm allowin' that what I say is in the minds of the military end of this 'ere force?" and he looked at me as if waiting for an answer.

"I am well content," was my reply, and Abraham nodded his head vigorously to show that he was of the same mind.

"All right," and Abel Grant spoke as if some great mental burden had suddenly been rolled away. "Now that is settled, an' seein's how we'll soon be in New York, if we ain't sich simples as to run the sloop aground, the question comes as to what's to be done when we do get there?"

"We'll go to headquarters without delay, as a matter of course," I said promptly, "and, our report having been made to General Putnam, we must set off on foot to find Sam, for it stands to reason that we can't use the sloop in our search while the king's ships are so thick in the lower bay."

"It wasn't that which I had in mind," he said with a laugh. "I was askin' what we'd do 'bout reportin' our prisoner?"

"As to that you must tell the whole truth," Seth said emphatically. "Put it to your general as to whether you'll be warranted in keepin' me, an' if he don't believe it safe, I'll be content to take my turn of prison duty."

"It don't strike me there's any need of goin' quite so far as that," Abel said doubtfully, and the Britisher replied, speaking more sharply than I had ever before known him to do:

"It's the only thing to be done, else I'll insist on your deliverin' me over to the officers of your army. We'll have the whole business fair an' above-board, or drop it."

This pleased me not a little, for it seemed the only true way to arrange matters. Also, we would still get the benefit of having captured one of the enemy while being ourselves prisoners, and I was exceedingly eager the Minute Boys should have the credit of such a feat.

It was decided, however, that Seth should remain aboard the sloop while Abraham and I went to headquarters to make a report, for the reason that his uniform would not only attract attention; but might bring about trouble from some of the idle hot-heads on the streets.

As we neared the town, and our course of action was mapped out with so much discussion that every detail had been arranged, I literally quivered with excitement, for the time was near at hand when we would know if our services, slight though they had been, were such as might gain us the approbation of the commander.

It seemed to me particularly fortunate that night had come, for I counted on being able to get a meeting with General Putnam more readily than would be possible in the day-time, and, besides, I was not minded to hold converse with any one after having seen him, for it was quite within the range of chances that while walking across Bowling Green some of our acquaintances might be met.

Therefore it seemed to me as if everything worked in our favor, and when, finally, the Swiftsure was tied up at the Market Street bulkhead, I believed matters were going our way, though little did I dream how decidedly such might be the case.

"Go ashore as quickly as may be," Abel Grant said in a tone of command. "Seth an' I'll look after the sloop. Be sure to finish all your business with the commander; but at the same time get back here as soon as is seemly, for both the Britisher and I'll feel more comfortable in mind when we know if it is allowed that he shall stay with us."

Abraham had not spoken since we came off the

city, and when he followed me up the bulkhead and across Bowling Green in the direction of General Putnam's quarters, I asked the reason for his silence.

"To tell the truth, Ephraim, I am so kind of stirred up that speech seems impossible. I verily believe my heart is nigh to my mouth, so choked am I with fear lest after what seems to us such a good piece of work, General Putnam will put it down as a failure. Besides, I have come to think more about Sam than at any time since we cut loose from the frigate, and wonderin' if he hasn't already been taken prisoner."

He had no more than ceased speaking when from out the gloom came two figures, and we were within an ace of running afoul of them, so unexpectedly had they appeared.

I contrived to sheer off; but in so doing brushed with no little roughness past the smaller of the two, when I was startled to the verge of terror by hearing a voice cry:

"It's Ephraim Lyttle! How do you happen to be here, lad?"

Verily it seemed to me I had heard a ghost speak, for it was Sam's voice, and I felt confident as of my existence that he was either on Coney Island awaiting our appearance, or a prisoner on board one of the British vessels.

It was Abraham who aroused me from my stupor of bewilderment, which was nigh unto fear, by crying in a joyful tone:

"Sam Garratt! An' we believed the red coats had got hold of you!"

"The same has been said regardin' you," the

dear lad replied. "Luther Stedman spread the report that you of the sloop were captured."

By this time I was sufficiently master of myself to realize that fortune had been exceedingly kind to us, although my brain whirled in the effort to make out why the lad had remained in New York instead of coming to meet us as he proposed. However, I seized him by the hand to make certain he was the real flesh and blood Sam, instead of an apparition, pouring out a volley of questions which would have required a full hour in the answering, and giving no heed to the fact that he was demanding a like amount of explanation from me.

"We *were* captured," Abraham cried gleefully. "An' what is better, we made our escape, taking with us a lobster-back who had been sent on board the sloop as guard; but there isn't time to tell the story now, for we must first make report to General Putnam, an' then you shall come aboard, Sam, my boy, where you belong, to hear a full account of the wonderful adventures of the Minute Boys and their admiral."

Now it was I came to understand that none other than Lieutenant Winterbottom was Sam's companion, and again had fortune favored us, for he above all others would be able to gain, if so be any man could, a speedy interview with the commander.

"We had given up all hope of seeing you lads again, at least, until the war was come to an end," he said cheerily, taking me by the arm, "and I am as eager as Sam to hear the story, which I hope to do after you have seen General Putnam.

You lads have done good work, better perhaps than could have been performed by men, and the fact that you lost no time in sending the report has pleased the general exceedingly."

"Is that true, or are you simply tryin' to smooth down our vanity?" I asked, waiting in suspense for the answer.

"General Putnam himself said, after your friend Sam made his report, that you had gained more information in a shorter time than he believed could have been possible."

Now indeed was I treading on air. We had returned in safety after it seemed as if our race was already run, and what was yet better, had won the approbation of the soldier who had trusted in us.

Ten minutes later, thanks to the efforts of Lieutenant Winterbottom, we were standing in the presence of General Putnam, and I was telling the story of our adventures with no little of detail, for it seemed to me as if the more he learned regarding that which had been done, the more readily would he fall in with our plan of adopting Seth Hartley, for by this time I had begun to doubt whether he might believe it wise.

"And your prisoner; where is he?" the general asked when I had come to an end of the tale.

"On board the sloop, sir, an' now we would keep him, if it so be we may."

"How is that? How is that? Hob-nobbing with the enemy before you have really begun to show your mettle?" and I fancied the general spoke sternly.

"He's a very decent fellow, sir, much more so than I would have believed any lobster-back could

be. His parole was given when we first escaped, an' I believe he'll hold to it. He doesn't claim to be willin' to do aught against the king; but at the same time swears to do nothin' for him, an' Abel Grant proposes that we take him on to help work the sloop."

Then I went on to explain yet more in detail all that we four had said while the matter was under discussion, to the end that Seth Hartley's position might be the better understood, and, having come to an end, was more than surprised to hear the commander say in a cheery tone:

"You may work it out in your own way, lad. If so be you and your 'admiral' have the faith in the promises of the prisoner, keep him with you, remembering, however, that at the first sign of his playing false you are to turn him over to the nearest military force. We are on the eve of a battle, and before hostilities begin I am expecting you Minute Boys will do yet further service for the cause. Go your way for to-night, and in the morning the lieutenant shall tell you what duty I would have you engage in."

It seemed to me this was sufficient intimation that the interview was at an end, and, making my best bow, but without venturing a word in reply, I backed out of the room, Abraham following, and Lieutenant Winterbottom saying in a whisper when we were just outside the door:

"Since I have already heard the story of your adventures there is no reason why I should go with you to the sloop, and the general has business for me here. I will see you in the morning."

Then we three hurried away in the direction of Market Street, so eager to make report to the

"admiral" that we did not venture to indulge in conversation on the way; but, having arrived near the sloop, Abraham said gleefully:

"Let's send Sam ahead in order to hear what Abel Grant will say at first sight of him."

And this we did, Abe and I following close behind, but standing in the cockpit when Sam entered the cuddy, and immediately was heard a cry of real terror from our "admiral," who must have thought much as I did, that it was an apparition rather than a flesh and blood Minute Boy.

During two or three minutes the uproar was so great that no one could hear what the other was saying, and then we settled down that Sam might tell how he contrived to make his way across Long Island.

The story was a short one, and with but little of event. With no more in the way of food than the ship's biscuit he took from the sloop, the lad traveled, without resting, all that night and during the next day, meeting but two who would have put any impediment in his way, and those he avoided by taking to his heels. Instead of going boldly through the villages he made detours, after day had come, and traversed the highways only when it became absolutely necessary.

"Yes, it was a hard pull," he said in reply to a remark of Abel Grant's. "More than once did I think my race was run, and had I stopped for a single moment to rest it would indeed have been over for many hours. Comin' to the ferry I took the first boat at hand, regardless of ownership, and pulled over here, bein' so nearly done up when I stepped ashore near the Bowlin' Green Battery that my feet felt heavy as lead, an' I dragged them

one after the other. The fact that the information I brought might be of great importance to the Cause, was the only thing which kept me up, and no sooner was my report made to the general than I went down all in a heap. Lieutenant Winterbottom tells me it was twelve hours before I could be aroused from the slumber which enchained me."

Having thus told his story, Sam proceeded to give us information of what the enemy had done since our departure from the town, and when he was come to the end we understood full well why General Putnam had said that a battle was near at hand.

General Howe had landed a greater portion of his troops on Staten Island, after the fleet came up and anchored off Vanderventer's Point. The Britishers had gone into camp on the hills, and the general's headquarters was at the Rose and Crown Tavern near New Dorp.

The Tories on the island had organized what they called a troop of Loyalists, under Governor Tryon, and were being drilled day by day. It was said nigh upon nine thousand men had gone into camp from General Howe's command, and then arrived Admiral Howe with more British regulars and a large body of Hessians. They also had disembarked on Staten Island, and now, so it was said, there were thirty thousand soldiers in condition to fall upon General Washington's army which did not number above twenty-seven thousand, at least seven thousand of which were in the hospital unfit for duty.

In addition to this disheartening news, Sam told us that two days before the ships of war Rose and Phœnix, their decks piled high with bags of

sand as protection, sailed up the bay past New York into the Hudson river, going as far as Haverstraw, which move, so the knowing ones declared, was for the purpose of opening a communication with the British Carleton, who was coming from Canada with no small army, and also to provide with weapons the Tories of Westchester.

Our fleet had not been idle while the Britishers were thus making preparations for an attack. Four condemned vessels were sunk in the channel between Governor's Island and the Bowling Green Battery, while obstructions were so placed as to prevent an entrance to the East river. Had it not been that our sloop was of such light draft, we would undoubtedly in the dark have found ourselves hung up upon some of these contrivances for shutting out the Britishers.

Seth also told us that the belief of the military authorities was that the first move made by the red-coats from their present encampment, would be on Long Island, and to that end the fort at Red Hook had been greatly strengthened and garrisoned with as many men as could find lodgment within it.

The redoubt on Governor's Island had been enlarged, and batteries were building along the East river as far as Harlem.

"Lieutenant Winterbottom says there will be a battle soon, an' on Long Island," Sam went on. "I'm thinkin' if any work is given us, it will be nearabout our homes; at all events on the island. You must know that for the past four days a large force has been workin' on the redoubt that is to be called Fort Putnam, situated upon the hill back of your house, Eph, and there five guns are to be

mounted. Leadin' from it, down the hill to the old spring which father walled up last year, is bein' dug an intrenchment, and on the other side are to be breastworks in zigzag shape across the Flatbush Road.

"Half way between there and the mill-pond another redoubt is buildin', which I have heard was to be called Fort Green, an' near the road south of the Wallabout is another redoubt, where will be three or four guns. Three guns are to be mounted on Cobble Hill, with an intrenchment runnin' in circles like unto a corkscrew from the base of the hill to the top."

Sam's information was not well calculated to cheer. Because so much in the way of fortifying Long Island was being done, none of us questioned but that the battle, which the general had said was near at hand, would be fought there. Our own people might find themselves between the two armies, and as we realized this a gloom settled upon us, causing all to fall silent until Sam, who had had more time in which to become familiar with the danger, set about making the acquaintance of our prisoner, for, having heard the story of our adventures as told to General Putnam, he had no further need to ask questions concerning him.

Then Abel Grant aroused himself from the fit of despondency to remember that he was hungry, and straightway we insisted that Master Sam, who had been idling his time away and living on the fat of the land for the past four days, should resume his duties as cook, therefore soon the little cuddy of the Swiftsure was stiflingly hot and filled with the smoke of frying pork and fish, which last Abel Grant had bought from a boy who passed

nearby the sloop while we were at headquarters.

I fancied Seth Hartley had grown more jolly after learning that General Putnam was content for him to remain in our company, and he told us many stories while we were waiting for the long delayed meal, chiefly of what the Britishers had done nearabout Boston, for he was of the force which General Howe brought with him from that city.

It was well to midnight before any of us were ready to turn in, and then so soundly did we sleep that never one of us opened his eyes until Lieutenant Winterbottom leaped from the bulkhead down on to the deck of the sloop, causing her to heel over as if she had been struck by some passing craft.

"A pretty company of Minute Boys this is, to be asleep when the sun is a couple of hours high, and honest men have nearly finished a day's work!" the lieutenant cried cheerily, as he pushed open the hatch to look down upon us.

It can well be fancied that we scrambled out in a hurry, giving very little attention to our toilets that morning, so eager were all hands to hear what work was to be performed; nor did the lieutenant keep us long in suspense.

"If so be you still count yourselves as Minute Boys ready to obey the orders of the military commanders, your sloop is to be sailed into Wallabout bay, and there left at anchor as a headquarters for the company. The admiral and the prisoner will remain on board, ready to use her as a despatch boat, if occasion requires. The Minute Boys themselves are to make their way, by whatsoever course is most expedient, to some point on the shore over-

looking Staten Island, where strict watch is to be kept of the British encampment and the fleet. One of the party is to report each evening, making his way from the place selected for observation to where the sloop is anchored, and going across to the town in her. Do you understand the orders, lads, or shall I try to make them more plain?" the lieutenant asked when he was come to an end.

"We are simply to spy upon the enemy, as I understand it, sir, carryin' word each night to New York of what has been done durin' the day."

"Ay, that is it exactly, except that in case of any sudden movement on the part of the British you will despatch a messenger post haste with the information, the others waiting as long as is prudent so to do, taking due heed to your own safety in case the enemy proceed to make a landing on the Long Island shore."

"We will get under way at once, sir. There need not be any delay, for breakfast can be cooked while we are sailin' across," I said, and then harking back to the conversation which we lads had between ourselves in the cuddy on the previous night, I added, "Sam tells us that you saw Luther Stedman when he made his boasts as to having caused our capture."

"Ay, lad, although I question whether the Tory saw me. I chanced to be standing just inside the door of the coffee-house on Broad Street, when he entered with some kindred spirits and was explaining to them why it seemed necessary for him to leave town at once. It appears that he counted on going down the harbor to crow over you, and I have had no little satisfaction, since learning of

your safety, in imagining what must have been his feelings when he learned you had not only escaped, but carried off a prisoner."

"We are like to come upon him again, accordin' to my way of thinkin'," Abraham Decker said thoughtfully. "He an' his friends are such staunch Tories that wherever the red-coats are gathered there may we find them, like flies around molasses, an' it may be the Minute Boys will have an opportunity of giving Luther a dose of his own medicine."

"I cannot blame you for wanting to do something of the kind," the lieutenant said with a smile; "but you must remember that personal quarrels are to be put in the background now, because of your being engaged in a work that may prove to be of the greatest consequence to the Cause. As a matter of course you lads are not the only ones sent out to spy upon the enemy, but the general has believed from the first that three boys could do very much more of such work, and perform it better, than a like number of men, because of being less open to suspicion."

"There would be no question as to our havin' aroused suspicion, if we came across Luther Stedman," Sam said grimly. "He'd know without bein' told, why we were at such a distance from Wallabout bay, an' as for our dealing him a dose of medicine in case of comin' across the Tory cur, I'm thinkin' we're the ones who'd have to take it."

"You are not running your nose into as much danger as when you sailed down past the fleet," the lieutenant said as if thinking it necessary to stiffen our courage, and Abraham made haste to say:

"We're not like to turn back because of possible danger any more than we would run into it needlessly; but if on some night we fail to make a report, you may set it down as certain that Luther Stedman and his Tory followin' have got the better of us."

"In which case I shall immediately make it my business, unless peradventure I have other work that cannot be neglected, to hunt up this Tory of yours, and, once finding him, you may rest assured I will get some inkling of where you may be. Don't think that we here will be utterly careless as to your safety, for word has already been sent to the commanders of the different forces as to your duties, and orders given that every possible protection be thrown around you."

Then the lieutenant gravely shook hands with each of us in turn, even including Seth Hartley, and the expression on his face told more plainly than words could have done, that there was some question in his mind as to whether he might meet all of us again. In fact, in those days when the red-coats were pressing us so hardly, we who called ourselves Whigs could not but doubt, on parting with a friend, as to whether we might meet him again.

The lieutenant went on shore abruptly, and Abel Grant, wearing a more somber expression than usual, said as he made ready the canvas for hoisting:

"Cast off the hawsers, Seth! Sam, stir your stumps for a bit of breakfast, so that you three may set out with full stomachs, an' the work of fillin' them up finished before we come to anchor at Wallabout."

Then we pushed off from the bulkhead with barely enough wind to fill the sails, and while rounding the battery I could see how much more warlike was the appearance of everything than when I had last been there in the daylight.

Soldiers were marching and counter-marching, as if bent on some work more important than that of merely perfecting themselves in the drill; the sentinels looked to be more alert, and there was less of laughter and careless conversation ashore than I had ever observed.

Coming around the East river we could see plainly the obstructions which had been planted there, but in our small boat we had no difficulty in avoiding them. Then, stretching straight away toward Wallabout, we had before us on the New York side the newly built redoubts and intrenchments, until it seemed to me as if the entire town was surrounded by defenses, and save for the fact that I had seen that vast array of vessels, filled with men eager to kill us at the king's bidding, I would have thought that we might hold ourselves secure from any enemy whatsoever.

As it was, however, and knowing from Sam's story that General Howe could launch upon us fully eight thousand more men than we had fit for service, a big lump came in my throat as I asked myself how long we Whigs might be able to hold out against such superior numbers.

It was near to three hours, so light was the wind, before we were come to the sloop's old anchorage, and then, to my great delight, we saw my father and Sam's on the shore just making ready to take skiff, probably bound for New York.

It was a most opportune meeting, for otherwise

we might have been forced to depart upon our work of spying without having had speech with those whom we were so eager to see, and once they recognized us we had good proof of their affection, and what their anxieties must have been.

We Minute Boys went on shore at once, and there I would have told my father what we counted on doing, but that he checked me, asking if it was a service required of us by any of the officers of the army, and on being told that it was, he bade me hold my peace.

With this, however, I would not be content, knowing that it was no secret to those Americans stationed on the island, therefore might be repeated to him, and when I was come to an end of the instructions that had been given, he said, taking me by the hands:

"Go, my boy, without delay, and may the good God grant that you and I come together again very soon. Say a word of farewell to your mother, who, during nearly two days, mourned you as a prisoner aboard one of the king's ships, and then hasten away."

"Will you go on board, sir, and see our prisoner?"

"To what end?"

"I believe that while he won't declare himself a friend to the Cause, he is in heart favorable to it, and a word now and then from such as you and Master Garratt will do much to strengthen him in his purpose, for I am counting that before many days have passed he will come to believe that he may throw off all allegiance to the king, through having learned how bitterly we of the colonies have been oppressed."

"Both Master Garratt and myself will go on board the sloop before leaving," my father said, and thus we parted, I running with all speed toward my home, and he pushing off in the skiff toward the Swiftsure.

CHAPTER VIII.

DETECTED.

Of the parting with my mother the least said the better for my own peace of mind. As a matter of course she insisted on knowing where I was going, and for what purpose, after which she gave way to grief as if I was on the road to certain death, and this although I did my best to persuade her that the danger was so slight as not to be worthy of consideration.

Abe and Sam had both taken advantage of the opportunity to run home for a moment, and when we were together again I had no need to be ashamed of the redness of my eyes, for theirs were much like mine.

We walked rapidly and in silence, neither caring to indulge in conversation until the sadness caused by parting from the dear ones had worn away somewhat, and it goes without saying that we took the most direct course for Gowanus bay, striking across country, rather than traveling by the highways where we might be seen by some of our Tory neighbors.

A full hour passed before a word was said, and then Abe recalled to my mind that I was not fit to hold myself as leader of Minute Boys, even though my force numbered only three.

"We have forgotten to bring away any provisions, an' if two are to remain on duty while the third goes back with whatsoever of a report we may have to make, some of us stand a good chance of bein' hungry before seein' Wallabout bay again."

I came to a full stop, believing it was absolutely necessary we retrace our steps in order to atone for the neglect; but Sam would not listen to anything of the kind.

"It is near noon already, an' if we go back there'll be little hope of our seein 'the British fleet this day. To go around by Master Onderdonk's, whom we know is a true friend to the Cause, will not take us out of the direct course more than a quarter-mile, an' there we can get what will stay our stomachs until the return of him who goes to New York first."

This was good advice, for, as I have said, we had walked a full hour before discovering our oversight, and, as a matter of course, twice that length of time would be wasted if we went back at once.

Therefore it was we struck out for the highway, being forced to do so in order to reach Master Onderdonk's; but we met no one, either Whig or Tory, and, therefore, no great harm was done, save as we lost that much time which might have been saved if I had had my wits about me.

The good man was at home, much to our satisfaction, and when we explained that we had been set a task by General Putnam, and told how it chanced we had set off without provisions, he would have loaded us down like beasts, so eager was he to do that which might further the Cause.

Because it seemed as if time was precious, we did

not remain at Master Onderdonk's any longer than was absolutely necessary; but on coming out on the highway once more, in order to strike across the country again, whom should we see but Luther Stedman's father astride his gray mare, riding toward his home from the direction of Gowanus bay.

The old Tory eyed us sharply as he passed at a jog trot, but spoke never a word, and when he was beyond earshot Sam said ruefully:

"It is bad luck to meet such as he when we are settin' out on a task like this! He has most likely been to give some information to the Britishers concernin' our people, an' now, havin' seen us, will spread the fact of our headin' for the Narrows."

"Well, an' how much will that advantage the old Tory?" Abe asked disdainfully. "Haven't we the right to travel over the same road he does?"

"Ay, but it is not of any advantage to our mission that it be known by such as he."

"I'm allowin' it won't make one hair white or black in the long run," Abe replied carelessly, and then he fell to speculating as to what the Britshers would do if they came to know Seth Hartley was on board the sloop, claiming to be bound by his parole.

"I reckon we'd find ourselves in trouble, if the red-coats came up this way," I replied with an inward quaking. "If it was believed we really held him prisoner, his comrades would do what they might to set him free; and in case it was suspected that he staid of his own free will, then would the officers seek him out as a deserter. In either event, we'd be in hot water."

"There's no need of crossin' bridges till we come to them," Abe interrupted irritably. "We can find

trouble enough by lookin' forward to what's in hand, without runnin' around to hunt for it."

After that the conversation lagged again, and very little was said among us until we were finally come to where it was possible to have a full view of all the king's ships at anchor, and verily it seemed as if the Narrows and bay were entirely filled by them. We could see everywhere on the opposite shore the white tents of the army, until it was as if the island was completely covered by them, and I said to myself that our people could not hope to hold out very long, however desperately and bravely they might fight, against such an array of disciplined and well-armed men.

Boats were passing from the ships to the shore, some carrying men, and others deeply laden as if with ammunition. On the decks of the vessels every one appeared to be busily engaged with this task or that, and there could be no question about General Howe's making ready to strike a heavy blow.

"Can you make out what is bein' done?" I asked of my comrades after we had gazed at the thrilling scene a full ten minutes in silence.

"It would be hard to tell what they wasn't doin'," Sam replied with a mirthless laugh. "Say, doesn't it look as if there were more vessels than when we sailed down the bay?"

"Sure; you yourself told us that Admiral Howe's fleet had come in while we were makin' the voyage around Long Island," Abe replied grimly. "I wonder if General Putnam would like to know exactly how many are anchored off here?"

"Unless we could tell him how many of the ships were armed, I don't fancy the information would

be very valuable," was my answer, as if I knew it all, although I was such a poor leader as to have forgotten that we would need provisions during our time of spying. "The question is what there is to be seen of which he would want to know," and again I gazed around, vainly trying to hit upon some one thing of importance.

It was Sam who finally hit upon that which seemed to have a decided meaning outside the general bustle and apparent confusion.

"Look at the ship-buildin' that's goin' on over there!" he cried, pointing straight across from where we crouched on the high bank. "They are makin' a lot of big scows as if their fleet wasn't large enough already!"

We had no difficulty in distinguishing that which he pointed out. I could see no less than a dozen huge craft made of roughly hewn logs, on which soldiers were yet working, and I wondered greatly what could be the meaning of such work until Abe suddenly cried:

"They are gettin' ready to cross the Narrows, an' the scows are to transport the men an' heavy guns! It must be they count on landin' hereabouts! I reckon we've got somethin' to tell General Putnam now!"

"But it stands to reason he knows it already," Sam objected. "Our people at Red Hook can see what is goin' on, as well as we."

"We are to make a report every night," I interrupted, "an' if one is to be made 'twixt now an' sunrise, it seems as though it should be about the scows, for I can see nothin' else that would be of interest."

"But if he knows about them already?"

"It is not for us to guess what he may know; but simply to tell him what we have seen. He said there were others nearabout on the same errand as ours, an' I reckon he wants to hear from three or four, in order to make certain that the information is correct. Let's take due heed as to what is bein' done there, an' then make ready to go back to New York."

"Who is to act as messenger this time?" Sam asked just a trifle impatiently, and I replied laughingly:

"I reckon we'll have to draw lots again."

"It isn't fair to make me do that twice runnin'. I was chosen the last time, an' it seems as if you an' Abe ought to take your chances."

"So we will," I said, determined that there should be no ill-feeling among us Minute Boys if I could prevent it. "You prepare the twigs, an' we'll soon settle who shall go."

Abraham made no objection to this proposition, and soon Sam was ready. I took first choice, my comrade insisting it should be so, and there was left in Sam's hand the shortest twig for him.

"All right, I'll toddle back, leavin' you fellows here to have a good snooze, for of course you can't do any spyin' in the night," he said cheerily. "Let all three of us see what we can make out, an' after the sum of it has been put together, I'll set off. When am I to come back?"

"The general or Lieutenant Winterbottom will tell you as to that," I replied, mentally blessing the good fortune which saved me from a long tramp across the island, with the chances of being gobbled up by some of the Tories who might be prowling around in search of a Whig.

When each of us had searched the opposite shore carefully with our eyes, we told Abe what we had seen that appeared to be of the most importance, and this, together with what he himself had observed, made up the information, slight though it was, which he was to carry to the commander.

It seemed much like a clear waste of labor to make the journey to New York simply to repeat what we had seen, for there could be no question but it was already known to our people that the Britishers were building scows; the order had been given, however, and it was for us to obey rather than question it.

It was agreed that Abraham should retrace his steps over very nearly the same course we had just come, when, beyond a question, he would find the "admiral" and his "crew" on the lookout.

Then would come the cruise to New York, and the making of the return voyage. If nothing occurred to cause delay, and there was a sailing breeze, we allowed that Abraham should be back in Wallabout bay by daylight.

We could not expect him to arrive before noon on the morrow, and it might well happen, even though no danger threatened, that we should not see him for a full twenty-four hours. Fortunately, however, the time of his return was of but little moment, providing no especial danger threatened, and we agreed that if when the sun set again he had not come, I would take my turn at carrying the report, trusting to the chances of meeting him on the way.

He did not take any portion of the food which Master Onderdonk had so generously supplied, because of there being stores in plenty when once he

was on board the sloop; but set off in light marching order, and with a cheery word on his lips.

There was no reason whatsoever why I should feel concerned about him, and yet strange to say, my heart was heavy with the sense of impending evil when he vanished amid the gloom, leaving Sam and me to remain where was no possibility we might accomplish anything until the sun had arisen again.

"It is only a question of a long tramp," my comrade said when we two were alone, as if he like myself had some forebodings as to the future. "There isn't one chance in an hundred that he will meet with any Tories in the night, if he follows the course by which we came, an' we have no reason to feel anxious concerning him."

"Then let's drop the subject," I said a trifle irritably, for the suspicion that Sam was thinking of possible evil in Abraham's path made me exceeding nervous. "We have nothin' to do betwixt now an' mornin', save sleep, an' I'm thinking we'd best get about the job."

There was little need for us to make any preparations for the night. A bed out of doors while the weather was so hot would afford more of comfort than one in a house, and we made ready for slumber by simply searching for a smooth, level place whereon we could stretch our limbs at full length.

It was while we were thus engaged that I fancied it possible to hear the hoof-beats of a horse on the highway, which at this point passed within less than an hundred yards of the shore, and, motioning Sam to remain silent, we stood listening two or three

moments without hearing anything, when I came to believe that my ears had deceived me.

"What was it?" Sam asked anxiously.

"Nothin', else we would have heard somethin' more by this time," and I told him of what I fancied came to my ears.

"You may set it down as a fact that there is no one stirrin' nearabout here unless he have business with the British fleet, an' that could best be attended to in the daylight," Sam replied carelessly, as he laid himself down to sleep.

The spot which we had selected was just within a sparse clump of fir bushes, which would serve to break the wind and screen us from view of all save a careful scrutiny. As a matter of course it was open on the water side, affording an unobstructed view of Long Island, and when we were stretched out at full length upon the ground, it was possible to see the riding lights of the vessels, the camp-fires, and the numberless lanterns which marked the location of the temporary shipyard, telling us plainly that the work of preparing the scows was being pushed forward with all possible speed, since men were laboring by night as well as by day.

Neither Sam nor I were inclined for conversation, nor did slumber visit our eyelids, and when we had laid there motionless for ten minutes or more, I heard what was like stealthy footsteps near at hand. That the same sound had come to Sam's ears I knew when, without changing position, he clutched my arm to attract attention, and as if with one accord we two rose to a sitting posture.

That a human being was approaching there could

be no question, and it seemed equally certain search was being made for somebody or some particular spot, while every precaution was being taken against detection. Had I been a fit leader for our little party of Minute Boys, I would have remembered our meeting with Master Stedman, when he eyed us so closely without speaking, and have put this fact with that which came to our ears, in such a manner that the whole situation must have been made plain.

As it was, however, the thought came into my mind that some one was coming up thus cautiously in order to spy upon the doings of the Britishers, and, therefore, believing the newcomer to be a friend, I was all unprepared for that which we saw a moment later.

The night was not so dark but that we could distinguish quite clearly objects close at hand, and when the bushes were drawn apart with a cautious hand we saw the face of Luther Stedman looking down upon us.

Recognition on both sides came at the same instant, and as he suddenly drew back with a gesture of disappointment, Sam and I sprang to our feet, both believing it was absolutely necessary for our own safety that he be prevented from leaving the spot.

As a matter of course we were unarmed, and it was only likely to suppose if, as seemed to be the case, the sneak had been searching for us, he was prepared for an encounter; but we gave no heed to such possible fact, the only thought in our minds being that we must prevent him from escaping.

Our eagerness to protect ourselves was more than a match for his thirst to be revenged, and he

had not taken above a dozen steps in flight before we were upon him.

The cur turned at bay, finding that it would be impossible to give us the slip, and at the same time shouted at the full strength of his lungs:

"Bear a hand lively, Ezra! The rebels are upon me!"

While uttering this appeal for help he aimed a blow at me, and I caught it full on the cheek with a sting that came near to dazing me for the instant; but, fortunately, at the same instant he struck out Sam gave him one directly under the jaw, felling him to the earth in a twinkling.

"Hold him there!" I shouted. "Here comes the other cur!" and I darted forward to gain the shelter of a bush, hoping the newcomer might not see me until I had had time to receive him properly.

In this I was only partially successful, for the second Tory saw me at the very instant he was pushing swiftly through the light screen of foliage, and leaped upon my shoulders like a cat.

It goes without saying that we both came to the earth, where we rolled over and over striving unsuccessfully to get a grip on each other's throats, and all the while Luther was screaming for help at the full strength of his lungs.

My antagonist was no sooner upon me than I recognized him as that Ezra Billings who lived near to Red Hook with his uncle, as rabid an old Tory as ever went unhung. The lad was a good twenty pounds the heavier, had often boasted of his ability to down me in a rough and tumble fight, and verily now was come the time when he had an opportunity to make his words good.

Understanding that I must gain a speedy advan-

tage if I counted on coming off best, it can well be fancied how desperately I struggled; but he was too much for me, particularly after getting a grip on my throat which I could not shake off, and then it seemed as if death stood very near at hand. I could no longer breathe; there came into my head a buzzing as if a dozen mill-wheels were running at full speed, and the strength left my arms. I believed myself to be dying; I was dimly conscious of a crackling sound, and all became a blank.

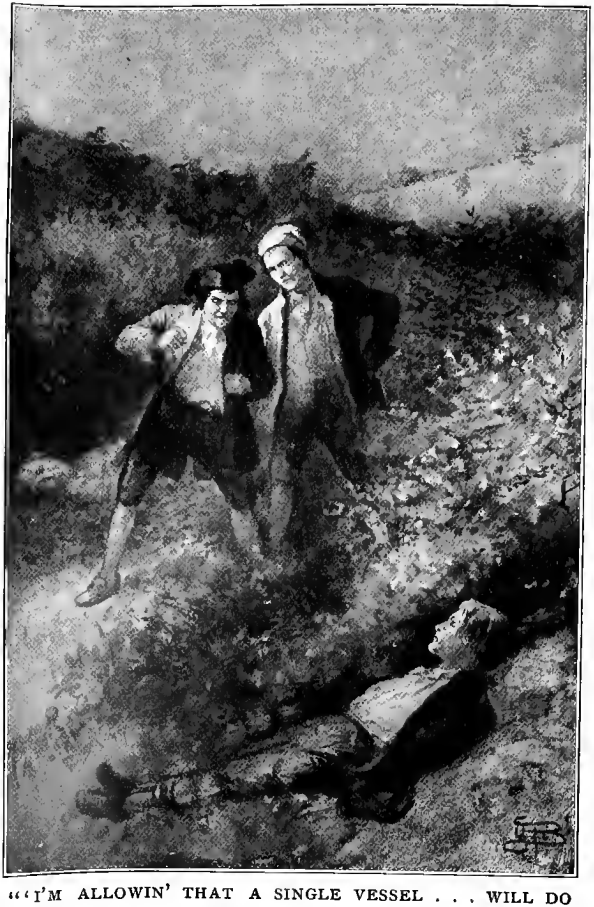
When I returned to consciousness, which must have been very shortly after having been deprived of it, my arms were tied behind my back; I was lying near the bushes, and a dozen paces away two figures were bending over a prostrate body.

If my life had depended upon it I could not have repressed the groan which escaped my lips on thus understanding that Sam and I had been worsted in the fight. We had outwitted the entire British fleet only to come to grief at the hands of two rascally Tories whom we should have downed with but little trouble! The career of the Minute Boys had been cut short very quickly, and in a manner to cause them shame.

As I understood an instant later, Luther and Ezra were binding Sam when I saw them bending over him, for they soon stood erect, the work having been finished, and, seeing that I was aware of what was going on, that Stedman cur said in a tone of reproach:

"So your race is run at last, Ephraim Lyttle! You had the advantage of me once; but it was short-lived, an' now my turn has come to give you a dose!"

There was anger instead of sorrow in my heart



"'I'M ALLOWIN' THAT A SINGLE VESSEL . . . WILL DO THE TRICK THIS TIME.'"

as he spoke, and I cried with no little satisfaction:

"I got the best of you twice, you cowardly Tory, an' shall live to give you another taste of the same medicine; but it will have a more lastin' effect. You counted that the Britishers had paid off your score; but more than one fleet was needed to hold us!"

"I'm allowin' that a single vessel, an' a mighty small one at that, will do the trick this time," he replied with a menacing gesture which caused me to believe he counted on striking one who could not defend himself, and most like he would have done so but that Ezra Billings caught him by the arm, at the same time whispering in his ear.

"Don't be afraid that I'll make a fool of myself!" he cried impatiently, throwing off Ezra's hand. "I understand that he belongs aboard the frigate, an' by daybreak to-morrow the scoundrelly Whig shall be where he can't slip away in the fog!"

My heart sank within me as he spoke. It was impossible any of our friends would come that way before daylight, and he could readily put us aboard a British vessel where would be no chance of escape. The only wonder in my mind was that he did not set about the task at once, instead of waiting until morning. Afterward I came to know that the Tories of Long and Staten Islands had received most peremptory orders not to make any attempt at going within the British encampment or among the fleet during the hours of darkness, unless they brought information of the most vital importance.

It was useless to bandy words with the villain, because, while we were helpless and in his power, he would get too much satisfaction from an ex-

change of threats, and I held my peace while he told of all that he would do once we were confined in the prison of the frigate from which we had escaped.

"After we've left you safe in the hands of our friends, where you'll have a chance to think over your sins against the king, an' won't grow overly fat on bread an' water, we'll set about cuttin' the claws of that idiot who trains in your company — Abel Grant, an' by this time to-morrow we'll have possession of your sloop. I allow Ezra an' I can make better use of her than you have," Luther said tauntingly, as he stood over me with hand upraised to shut off my wind if I should venture to speak, and Sam cried stoutly:

"Don't count on too many chickens at one time, you sneakin' Tory! It will do Abel Grant's heart good to have a whack at you, an' I'm thinkin' our sloop won't advantage you much, save when you're carried to New York in her to answer for what has been done this night!"

Luther turned as if he had suddenly been stung, and I said, raising my voice for Sam's benefit:

"Let him wag his tongue for a while, lad; it isn't harmin' us, an' comes more natural than to stand up in a fair fight like a man. It's a long lane which has no turn, an' he can count to a dead certainty that our day will come."

"It will be a good many years hence, Ephraim Lyttle, for once you're safely housed on one of the king's ships, there's small chance of your goin' free in a hurry."

I winced under the words, knowing only too well that they were true. Already had the officers of a certain frigate in the king's fleet cause to feel sore

against us because we had pulled the wool so completely over their eyes, and even though that trick had not been played, the son of so well known a Whig as my father, would not soon be set at liberty. Once aboard the British vessel we could count on staying there, or in some other prison, for many a day, unless by a lucky chance our people might come off the victors in the struggle, and just then so happy a conclusion did not appear probable.

It had never been in my mind that Ezra Billings possessed overly much sound common sense, but on this night he showed himself the superior of Luther in that respect, for I heard him say in a low tone, leading his Tory friend aside as if to speak secretly:

"I'm of the idea that we had better not waste any time in crowin' over what we've done, an' it'll be better that we make our preparations for the visit to the fleet as soon as day breaks. There's no tellin' when the friends of these fellows may show themselves. Remember that your father said there were three, an' we've found only two."

I could see even in the gloom that Luther was startled by the suggestion that there might be others of our company near at hand, for he stepped outside the fringe of bushes to look eagerly around, and no longer showed any very keen desire to taunt us.

After a whispered conversation which we could not overhear, I saw Ezra Billings start off in the direction of the highway, and Luther began pacing to and fro where he might see us and at the same time make certain no one could approach from the road without being observed by him.

The bushes hid him ever so slightly from our view, and, taking advantage of this fact, Sam began rolling over and over on the ground until he was close beside me, when he whispered softly:

"Think you there is any chance Abe may get back before these curs are ready to take us to the fleet?"

"None whatever, lad," I replied despondently. "He could hardly go from here to Wallabout an' back without stoppin', 'twixt now an' sunrise. Even with a good wind, an' nothin' to hinder him in the way, I fail to see how he might get here until after we've been a good twelve hours in the frigate's prison."

"I'm not certain that death wouldn't be more easy than a prisoner's life!" the lad said bitterly, and for the instant I could think of no cheering word, for the gloom in my own heart was very thick just then.

Suddenly came a ray of light, very faint, but sufficient to set my heart bounding violently.

"With what are your hands bound?" I whispered ever so gently, keeping my eyes fixed on Luther to make certain he had no suspicion that we were holding converse one with another.

"A rope, I believe, which Ezra Billings was wearin' in the stead of a belt."

"Turn on your face. There is just a chance I might loosen it with my teeth."

Sam obeyed, but I could understand from the sluggishness of his movements that he had little faith in my ability to accomplish anything in such a manner.

It was indeed a rope less than half an inch thick,

as I found once I had set my teeth into it, and, faint though my hope was, I went feverishly to work, spurred to do that which at another time might have been impossible, by the picture of the prison aboard the frigate, which stood out clear and ominous in my mind.

Within five minutes I learned that nothing could be effected by trying to untie the knot with my teeth, and then I raised my head to see what Luther might be doing. He still remained on guard, and as I gazed at the cur Sam whispered:

"I thought you couldn't do it. Turn around; perhaps I may have better luck."

"Wait until I have done tryin'. The knot can't be untied, but my teeth are good, an' if Ezra Billings don't come back too soon, I may be able to chew it apart."

Verily it seemed a hopeless task to thus sever the stout bonds; but if it could be done our prison doors would not be open so wide, and I worked as never before, hardly ceasing to draw a long breath, or to give any heed as to what Luther might be doing.

Let him who thinks my task a simple one, himself try the experience of cutting a manila rope with his teeth, and he will soon understand that nothing save sheer desperation could have kept me at the apparently hopeless task.

The blood bounded violently through my veins when, by the sense of touch, I knew a single strand had been cut, and I stopped sufficiently long to whisper to Sam at the same time that I took another look at Luther:

"It ain't impossible, lad; but is only a question of time. If Ezra will stay away half an hour

longer I'll have you free, an' once we're in shape to fight it must be to the death, rather than a long dose of British prison."

"Don't waste precious time talkin'; but keep at the work, if so be it is possible to cut the bonds. Trust me for knowin' what to do once my hands are loose!"

CHAPTER IX.

TURNING THE TABLES.

I WAS literally trembling with joy when the moment came that I had gnawed half-way through the rope, and just when it seemed as if success must attend my efforts, the sound of footsteps told that some one was approaching.

Only with difficulty did I repress a cry of disappointment and rage, believing Ezra Billings had come back, and Sam rolled hastily over on his back that it might not be seen we two had been in communication.

Hope sprang up an instant later, however, when only Luther's evil face looked in at us to make certain we were as he left us. I fancy we had remained so nearly silent that he thought it possible we might have rigged up some plan for escape, and it was well for us that he did not know how near such a supposition was to the truth.

"This is the last time I shall have a chance of seein' you Whigs, except through the bars of the frigate's prison, an' I don't want to waste any chances," he said with an evil leer.

It was difficult to hold my peace, so strongly was I tempted to give him a tongue lashing; but I remembered that the longer we held him in converse, even though the subject might be a bitter one, the

longer would we be deprived of an opportunity to continue the work so well begun, and some such thought must have been in Sam's mind, for he remained silent when I knew full well he was actually aching to speak out that which was in his heart.

"So you've come to understand that we've got you fast, eh?" Luther continued after waiting an instant without receiving any reply. "Don't forget that I've got friends aboard the fleet, an' they'll give me every opportunity of lookin' in to see that you're stayin' where you belong. If you two Whigs don't have a hot time from this out, it won't be fault of mine!"

We remained silent, and evidently despairing of arousing us to wrath he wheeled about, returning to his former post of duty. Then, in a twinkling, Sam was lying on his face in front of me once more.

Nervous and excited as I was, it seemed as if the Tory cur had occupied a full half-hour of our precious time, though I now question if he stood over us more than two or three minutes, and I went to work with my teeth in a fever of energy.

Then, when it seemed to me as if the work was well nigh done, I heard the sound of footsteps in the distance, and immediately afterward heard Luther shouting Ezra's name.

"It's too late now!" Sam cried despairingly, and I set my teeth hard, grinding them together in desperation at the same instant that he exerted all his strength to give one mighty tug.

Then it was that I was near to crying aloud in triumph and exultation, for the partially severed rope was broken asunder, and at almost the same

instant Sam was at work on the bonds which held my arms behind me.

"Have you found the boat?" we heard Luther cry, and from a distance came the reply:

"Ay, but you'll have to help launch her, for the tide is down, an' she's high up on the beach. We can take your Whigs there, an' let 'em enjoy seein' us makin' ready to carry them where they belong."

My arms were free by this time, and I whispered excitedly:

"Can you see anythin' that will serve as a weapon?"

"We're not needin' any," was the grim reply. "I'm so eager to get even with those scoundrelly Tories for what they've made me suffer, that I can handle twice my weight, in anythin' like a fair fight," and Sam crept toward the fringe of bushes, in order, as I understood, to be ready to receive Luther when next he came.

And he had not long to wait. I crouched low that the cur might not suspect anything and remain at a distance until Ezra came up, and by so doing showed more wisdom than at any time since having called myself the leader of the Minute Boys, for Luther, eager to set us in motion, came running through the screen of foliage as he shouted:

"You're to move lively, now, you miserable Whigs, an' if either of you tries to hang back in the harness, he'll get a dose that won't quickly be forgotten."

Luther set us in motion all right; but we were not the ones who got the dose just then. When the Tory came through the bushes, Sam, who was bending low behind the screen, caught him by the legs,

and the fellow went headlong to the ground, I clapping my hand with no gentle force over his mouth even as he fell.

"Get that belt which was buckled on my arms!" I whispered. "Work lively, an' I'll keep his tongue still so Ezra won't suspect anythin'."

It was impossible for Luther to put up much of a fight while one of my hands was over his mouth and the other on the top of his head pressing it down among the pine needles, and Sam was by no means a laggard in obeying the command I had given.

He had the belt buckled around Luther's arms almost before I was done speaking, and then ripped off a goodly piece of the Tory's shirt, with which he made a gag. When this last was in place, and held by the rope that had so lately fettered Sam, we were ready to give Master Billings the reception of his life, and there is no question in my mind but that he got it.

"Have the Whigs nestled 'round much since I left?" he asked with a laugh as he stepped within the line of bushes, and on the instant I dealt him a blow on the chin that seemingly knocked the life out of him, for he fell like a log, and Sam asked nervously:

"Have you killed him, Eph?"

"I reckon there's life enough left in him to do considerable mischief to the Cause if so be he has the chance. He was needin' that same dose for the squarin' of accounts between us, an' I reckon he got it full an' plenty. I wouldn't trust these sneakin' Tories even when they look harmless, so while I make certain he don't find himself sufficiently to raise an outcry, do you see what can be

used with which to put him in somethin' the same shape we were a few minutes ago."

By the time we had bound our prisoners securely, each with a gag in his mouth, Sam and I had sacrificed the greater portion of our shirts; but this waste of good clothing we did not mourn over, and would willingly have given up all we wore rather than take any chances of their giving us the slip.

"That's what I call turnin' the tables in good shape," Sam said in a tone of deepest content as he wiped the perspiration from his face, for the night was warm and we had had considerable vigorous exercise. "The question now is, what we'll do with the sneaks?"

"Take 'em to New York!" I replied emphatically, for while gnawing at the rope which bound Sam's arms I had decided what we should do in case we succeeded in changing places with the Tories.

"New York!" Sam cried as if in dismay. "It can't be done!"

"Why not?"

"We'd never get from here to Wallabout with 'em, an' that's the fact."

"I can't see why it shouldn't be done. With those gags to prevent them from makin' any outcry, an' the points of our pocket knives for spurs, I fail to see why the trick can't be turned, if we set out at once."

"But what about our work here?"

"It won't suffer durin' the hours of darkness, an' at least one of us can be back here before the sun rises."

"There's nothin' will please me more than to

send 'em as a present to General Putnam, an' if you say it can be done, I'm ready for the venture; but we'll be in a box in case of runnin' across two or three Tories," Sam said grimly, and I replied with a laugh of relief, for it was mighty enlivening to be free once more:

"Lads who have been as near a British prison as you an' I, can afford to take some chances for the sake of servin' out properly such sneaks as these, an' if by any bad luck we should come across a lot of Tories, we'll leave our mark on some of 'em before takin' to our heels."

I was not such a fool that I failed of understanding how precious time was to us just then. If by daylight we had not arrived at Wallabout bay, then the chances were decidedly against our ever getting there with the prisoners, for as soon as the sun rose the Tories would be out in full force, the presence of the British fleet having stirred them into activity as the sun does half-frozen flies.

Even while talking with Sam I had asked myself what could be done if we arrived before the sloop had returned from the trip to New York with Abe, for I was not minded to bring down the wrath of our neighbors upon my father and mother by making of their house a prison. However, so I told myself, it would be time enough to consider what should be done after we had come to the bay, and thus I put all forebodings as to the future from my mind.

Sam was eager to be off, as indeed was I, and he said to the Tories who were looking woefully down at the mouth, as well they might:

"You fellows are goin' to take a little trip over to Wallabout in our company. We're not afraid

you'll try to give an alarm in case we come near anybody, for the gags you're wearin' ain't likely to slip out of place; but we've got to take some precautions against your laggin' on the way, because we're bound to make quick time, so look at the point of this blade," and Sam opened his pocket-knife. "We don't allow to treat you in any way harsh; but if so be you fail of stepping out as lively as we're needin' to move, I shall put a quarter-inch of this steel into whatever part of your body happens to be most convenient. That much you'd better not forget, for it ain't likely we shall speak of it again. Now get on your feet."

The prisoners evidently understood by the tone of Sam's voice that he would carry out his threat to the letter, for they scrambled up more quickly than I had supposed was possible for fellows whose arms were tied behind their backs.

There was no good reason for further delay, and we set off, driving the Tories like sheep before us, they striving in good shape not to deserve the pricking of the knife which Sam held conspicuously in his hand.

I had no good idea as to the time; but believed it was yet early in the night when we started, and, if no accident befell us we should be able, even while forced to strike across country, to arrive at Wallabout before the sun showed himself.

Under ordinary conditions I would have been too weary to walk at any very swift pace; but the thought of what we had so narrowly escaped caused me to forget all else, and on I pressed as if having come from a long time of rest.

Luther and Ezra had probably walked a number of miles before having come upon us; but they

showed no signs of lagging, and when we struck the trail which showed that Wallabout was less than five miles away, I believed we had ample time in which to conclude the journey.

"We've got over the worst of it," I said to Sam, speaking for the first time since we set out, it having been agreed that we would not indulge in conversation lest the sound of our voices betray us, and he replied grimly:

"I'd rather not do any crowin', though I'm beginnin' to believe that we'll work the trick all right. If Luther an' Ezra hadn't been quite so sure things were all goin' their way, we shouldn't be drivin' 'em along in this fashion."

I felt reproved, for the lad had hit the nail on the head. It would be more becoming in me to save my breath for the task before us, instead of crowing over what was not yet finished.

We pushed forward without slackening speed save once when crossing a brook, and I would have slaked my raging thirst, when I realized that our prisoners, with the cruel gags in their mouths, must be suffering more severely for water than we, and at once said to Sam:

"We won't show ourselves brutes, even though they were inclined to do so when everythin' was in their favor. Stand by to prod 'em with your knife in case they make any noise when I take out the gags."

Luther was the first who had the opportunity of wading into the brook and quenching his thirst. He said never a word until having drank his fill, and then how the cur did beg that I would not replace the gag!

"It seems as if I should choke to death with that

rag in my mouth," he cried appealingly. "I'll agree not to make the least little noise, no matter how many may come along, if you'll only let me have a fair chance to breathe!"

While he was speaking I unfastened the ropes of cloth which bound Ezra's gag in place; but he said never a word until after literally flinging himself into the brook to drink his fill, and we could well understand how great must have been his sufferings.

"What do you say, Sam?" I asked, and the lad replied:

"I wouldn't take the oath of a Tory, if anythin' depended on it, an' believe Luther would give an alarm if he saw any show to escape, even though he'd sworn himself blue in the face. However, we know full well how tough it must be to travel at a good pace on this hot night, with one's mouth tied up, an' if you're willin' I'll take the chances."

"I'll remember the favor, Sam Garratt," Ezra said feelingly as he arose refreshed from the brook, "an' if it ever comes my way to do you a good turn in payment, no matter what happens, I'll do it."

Not until this had been agreed upon did Sam and I slake our thirst, he watching the prisoners closely while I drank, after which I did a like turn for him.

Now was I more keenly on the alert for any sign of danger. The prisoners were in condition to bring down upon us those who would rejoice to send us aboard the British frigate, if so be we came near to any Tory habitation, and I was resolved that the gags should be replaced at the first indication that they were like to break the promises made.

We traveled a bit more rapidly after the Tories could breathe freely, and were come, as nearly as

I could judge in the darkness, within two miles of Wallabout, when suddenly I heard sounds as of footsteps on the trail ahead of us.

I had been leading the way, with the prisoners between me and Sam, who brought up the rear, and it can well be supposed that I came to a halt in short order, gripping Luther Stedman by the throat as I did so. Sam did not need to be told that something had given cause for alarm, and he seized Ezra by the arm, leading him cautiously to one side of the trail as he displayed his knife ostentatiously.

Within a dozen paces of the path I halted again, trusting that the gloom of the night would shut us out from view of whoever might be approaching, and crept back near the trail, leaving Sam to insure silence on the part of the prisoners, as I knew he could do, otherwise blood would be spilled.

Nearer and nearer sounded the footsteps, and while I was racking my brain to guess who might be traveling toward the Narrows at that time of night, the cause of the alarm came within view.

Just at the point where I crouched behind a friendly bush the foliage of the trees was sparse, and I could see against the lighter sky a form that caused me to cry aloud in joy and surprise.

It was none other than Abraham Decker who had sent us amid the bushes trembling with fear, and the exclamation which escaped me caused him to wheel about suddenly in alarm.

"Hold on, lad, don't run away like a coward!" I cried with a laugh which betokened relief of mind rather than mirth, and he, recognizing my voice, cried in a tone of anxiety as he came forward once more:

"What has happened that you are here? Where is Sam?"

"Yonder, hidin' from you. We have a couple of prisoners which we are takin' to the sloop, but didn't count on havin' such good luck as to find you."

By this time Sam came from the bushes driving the Tories before him, and now it was Abe's turn to cry aloud in astonishment as he recognized the prisoners.

"Luther Stedman an' Ezra Billings! How did it happen that you picked up sich cattle as these?"

The story of the night's adventures was not overly long as I told it, and Abe was doubled up with mirth before I came to the end; but so impatient was he to understand how our comrade chanced to be returning to his post of duty so soon, that Sam cut short the laughter by asking:

"Didn't you go to New York?"

"No; there's no more wind at Wallabout than can be found here, which ain't enough to float a feather. Because there was little show of movin' the sloop, Abel Grant proposed to row across in the skiff an' make the report in my stead, seein' that I didn't bring anythin' of great importance."

"Why didn't you go with him?" I asked, just a trifle impatiently, for at the instant it appeared to me as if General Putnam might think we were slighting our duty by thus sending a substitute with the report, even though it did not appear of great value in our eyes.

"You know full well, Ephraim Lyttle, that to cross in the skiff to Master Dyker's dock, than walk down to Bowlin' Green, an' return in the same way, would mean the spendin' of twenty hours, an'

if I had done so one of you must have been left on the shore alone when the next messenger set out."

The lad spoke truly, and I understood that his had been the wisest course, but that which puzzled me for the moment was what we should do. Even though we had taken two prisoners, we were not warranted in leaving our post of duty to carry them to New York, and, besides, there was considerable doubt coming up in my mind as to how General Putnam might view our capturing the Tories.

It was Abraham who settled the matter, by saying:

"I reckon you two had better keep on to the sloop, an' wait there till Abel gets back. I'll toddle along the way I started, an' you should join me by noon, though it'll come a bit hard on the legs; but that you can forget in view of what you've escaped. When you get to the Narrows I'll be in trim with whatever of importance I've scooped in."

By pursuing the course he suggested we would still be following, to a certain degree, the orders given by General Putnam, and at least one of us could be overlooking the doings of the Britishers during all the hours of daylight.

Sam agreed this was the wisest course that could be pursued, and without further delay Abe went on his way, after stipulating that we set out to join him immediately upon Abel Grant's return from New York.

We pushed on toward Wallabout with somewhat lighter hearts because of knowing that there would be one of our number on duty when the sun rose; but I began to grow uncomfortably nervous regarding this capture of Tories when we had been sent

out for no other purpose than to spy upon the enemy's fleet.

Very shortly afterward, as it seemed to me, my mind being so engrossed with the question as to whether we were doing right in taking Luther and Ezra to New York that time passed rapidly, we came to the shore of Wallabout bay.

It yet lacked a full hour to daybreak; but, and this was a possibility I had not counted on, there was no skiff near at hand by which we could board the sloop. Abel Grant had taken the one owned by my father, and there was none other save at Sam's home.

"I reckon I shall have to go for her, though my legs ache after so much walkin'," Sam said grimly. "The sloop can't get in here, no matter how long we wait, an' an hour from now there will be more Tories around than will be pleasin' to the sight."

He hurried away without loss of time, and I sat down on the sand with the prisoners, relieved at having got them thus near New York; but anything rather than comfortable in mind regarding the reception we might meet with from General Putnam.

Sam came back with his father's skiff, and we boarded the sloop without having been seen, as I believed, by any enemy from the time our journey was begun.

Seth Hartley did not need to be told that the Tories were prisoners, after seeing that their hands were tied; but he asked no questions.

"I'll have breakfast ready in short order," he said, at once setting about the work, "an' I'm guessin' you can get solid comfort by stretchin' out

in the bunks, for you must have traveled far an' fast. Did you meet Abraham?"

I told him of our running across the lad on the trail, and explained in fewest words possible why we had the Tories with us, asking his advice by saying:

"Sam an' I are tired, an' about that there's no mistake, but we don't know how to arrange for a rest without first makin' the prisoners fast in some way."

"Why not give them all the cabin? You can sleep as well on deck in this weather, an' we'll carry the stove into the cockpit. By makin' the cuddy-hatch fast, you'll have the lads secure enough."

As he proposed so we did, he having first carried on deck all the provisions that might be needed, and then Sam and I stretched ourselves out on the locker in the cockpit, enjoying the chance to rest our limbs as we had never enjoyed anything of the kind before.

That Seth appeared to take especial care not to ask any question the answer of which would give information as to what we had seen or heard, I set down to a desire that he might not be suspected of betraying secrets, therefore took good heed to avoid speaking of what had been done, save in a general manner; but my mind was so full of anxiety regarding our right to take prisoners that I could not but give words to the thought.

"I don't understand how you could have done different than bring the lads here," the marine said thoughtfully. "Settin' them free would only have been to offer another chance for workin' mischief."

I did not expect he could set all my doubts at

rest, therefore this answer satisfied me, and I put the matter from my mind in order the better to enjoy that which was at hand.

Verily the food was delicious on that morning, and we ate of it — Sam and I, like lads who had been fasting eight and forty hours. Then, after suggesting that it be done, Seth carried into the cuddy a plentiful breakfast, with cold water in abundance, and after closing the hatch again and fastening it with the iron bolt made for that purpose, he said:

"You lads may sleep now, trustin' that your prisoners won't be tampered with by me. I have never had any love for Tories, believin' the people of a colony should hang together at a time like this, for men that will work harm to neighbors in favor of a king they've never seen an' who doesn't give a rap whether they live or die, are poor cattle."

"We're not a little bit afraid you'll do anythin' that ain't straight an' above-board," Sam said sleepily, and then, rolling himself into a more comfortable position on the locker, the lad's eyes closed in slumber.

Within a couple of minutes I followed his example, and when next I was conscious of my surroundings, Abel Grant stood looking down into the cuddy as if in there was to be seen some strange animal.

It goes without saying that I was called upon to relate the whole story immediately he saw my eyes were open; but I refused to begin until after he had told us of his trip to New York, and Seth aroused Sam that he might hear the conversation.

"There's nothin' to be told, lad," Abel Grant said irritably, for he was in a hurry to hear how we

had got hold of Luther and Ezra. "I repeated all that Abraham told me, an' explained to the general why one of you Minute Boys hadn't made the report. He allowed it was jest as well for me to come, an' much the same as said he was expectin' the Britishers would begin landin' men on the Long Island shore mighty soon. It's the early news of anythin' like that he wants, an' I'm told to say you're to count the minutes precious till he's been told. I didn't stay above five minutes at headquarters, so that's all there is to my yarn. Now let me have yours."

I wasn't chary of going into the details when I told of how Sam and I had been captured, and the way in which we had turned the tables. The story was a long one, and when finally I was come to the end Abel asked like a simple:

"Wa'al, now what'er you goin' to do with 'em?"

"Deliver them over to General Putnam."

"Do you know that he wants 'em?"

"I reckon that can soon be learned. At all events, if we're to be of any service spyin' upon the fleet, they can't be left at liberty, otherwise the Minute Boys will wind up their career in prison aboard one of the king's ships."

"You're right in that, lad, an' I was a fool for askin' the question. I'm allowin' you'll start for the Narrows agin' 'long 'bout sundown?"

I explained that Abraham would leave his post of duty when the night was so far come that it would not be possible to see anything on the opposite shore, and we would be there to take his place at sunrise.

"Then it'll be him who'll deliver the prisoners to the general. We're goin' to have quite a stiff

little breeze to-night, 'cordin' to all the signs, an' I can set him across in short order after he comes aboard."

Abel appeared to think there was nothing further to be said about the prisoners, and we talked of what the American troops were doing in the way of making ready for an attack upon the town, until Seth had another hearty meal ready for our eating.

When due attention had been given to this, Sam and I were set ashore in the skiff by Seth, and our return journey was begun.

It would have pleased both of us to visit our parents; but because of having brought in the prisoners it seemed like too much of a risk, owing to the fact that if any of our Tory neighbors became aware of our stopping at home for ever so short a time, it might be set down as proof that Master Garratt and father had had some hand in the capture of Luther and Ezra.

"We can't afford to take the chances," Sam said as he looked longingly in the direction of home, and then set his face resolutely toward the trail, I following in his footsteps.

CHAPTER X.

IMPORTANT INFORMATION.

FORTUNE favored us on this tramp across the island. We met with no person, either enemy or friend, owing to the fact of our avoiding the highways, and within two miles of the spot we had selected in which to do our spyin' came across Abraham on his way to the sloop.

It was much like finding a needle in a hay-stack, this meeting him in the thicket by accident, and I hailed it as a good augury for the future, causing Abraham to laugh heartily when the thought was put into words.

"It's like all of these 'good luck signs,' brought about by intention. I have had my ears open for you lads from the time of settin' out, an', with a fair idea of the course that would naturally be followed, it might have been more strange had we not come together."

"Have you anythin' of importance to report?"

"No; everythin' is much as when you left. The Britishers seem to be makin' good headway with their boat-buildin', an' are workin' like beavers. So far as I could make out they're not spendin' much time tryin' to learn what our people are doin', which is accounted for by the fact of their bein' in such

force that it seems like an easy task to overcome us when the preparations have been made."

Then Abe asked concerning what we had done with the prisoners, and, promising to return at the earliest possible moment to set my mind at rest regarding what General Putnam might say about our tackling Tories when we were ordered to spy upon the enemy, continued on his way, halting an instant later to cry out:

"I found a snug place in which to hide. Look just under the hill for a hole!"

We were at a loss to understand his meaning until having arrived at what we considered our station, and then we found what might be called a cave, although in reality it was nothing better than a place hollowed out by the water. It would serve to screen us from view of any who might creep up as Luther and Ezra had done, however, and we counted it a fortunate find.

Abraham had evidently spent no little time in making the place take on something of the appearence of a habitation, and Sam said in a tone of content as he seated himself on a big rock at the very edge of the hole, where could be had a clear view of the opposite shore:

"I wonder you an' I didn't think of huntin' for somethin' like this, Eph! We can be as snug as bugs in a rug here, an' I'm allowin' we'd be well sheltered in case of a shower. Besides, it's not such a bad place in which to sleep, an' seein's how there's nothin' for us to do 'twixt now an' daylight, why not turn in, for one must travel to Wallabout an' back when another night has come?"

I was not inclined for sleep just then, having had my fill during the day; but because of the op-

portunity I stretched myself at full length on the sand, and speculated as to what we Minute Boys might yet be able to do in the way of proving ourselves capable of playing the part of men, until my eyes finally closed in slumber.

When I awakened the day was just breaking, and, arousing Sam, we two crept down to the water's edge where we washed our hands and faces, a most pleasing duty because of the heat, which promised to be great before noon. Then we ate from the store of food brought from Master Onderdonk's, which was yet quite considerable, and settled down for a dreary time of watching.

The red-coats were at work on the unwieldy barges when it was possible for us to distinguish objects on the opposite shore, and I had no doubt but that they had spent the night at the same task. So far as we could judge, those on the fleet had nothing better to do than idle the time away, and there was but little movement in the encampment.

The forenoon was no more than half spent when, to our great surprise, Abraham suddenly appeared before the entrance to our cave, having approached so noiselessly that we had no hint of his coming.

"Yes, I made good time," he said in reply to my exclamation, throwing himself down on the sand as if weary to the verge of exhaustion. "I am allowin' that one of you will go with the next report, an' I can stay here until my legs are in better shape, for they are numb with much walkin'."

"But what about the prisoners?" I asked, irritated because he had not begun at once to tell the story, and he replied carelessly, as if the matter was of but little importance:

"Oh, they are all right; Lieutenant Winterbot-

tom has the curs in charge, an' will turn them over to the magistrate."

"The magistrate?" I repeated. "What has the city authorities to do with them? Aren't they prisoners of war?"

"I could not well make out the drift of the talk between the lieutenant and General Putnam; but the way it appeared to me was that they allowed the Tories couldn't be held by the army, since they were not soldiers, an'—Well, the fact of the matter is, Eph, I don't understand it myself, save that they are to be charged with makin' an assault on you and Sam, an' the lieutenant will see to it they are held in custody until you two can be there to appear against 'em, which means that they're safe in jail."

"Did the general make any complaint because of our capturin' 'em?" Sam asked.

"It looked to me as if he took it as a matter of course, knowin' you couldn't spy on the fleet an' have them hangin' 'round makin' trouble. Luther was chafin' a good bit under the collar when I left him; but Ezra's more of a decent fellow, an' says he won't forget how you treated him in the matter of the gag. The most important news I've brought is that we needn't make a daily trip to New York unless there's some decided move on the part of the enemy. What we're really here for, is to get word into New York as soon as possible after they start to make a landin', an' because of the orders given, the sloop will be off Red Hook from now on, so's to save us a journey to Wallabout."

This was good news indeed, for that tramp across the island at night was no little of a hardship, and when there was nothing new of which to make report, it seemed to me useless.

Abraham had brought with him an additional supply of provisions, together with a jug in which we could keep fresh water, and by the time the stores were packed away and the bottom of the cave smoothed off somewhat, we were, as I looked upon the matter, very comfortably fixed for three lads who were supposed to be doing military duty.

And now, because of there being nothing of interest to tell concerning ourselves, I propose to pass over without a word all that time when we remained in hiding, as it were, until the moment came that we had information in plenty for General Putnam.

Being able to keep a supply of water on hand, it was only necessary for us to leave our hiding place at such times as the stores ran low, and, consequently, we had no fear of being seen by enemies on land, while it was an easy matter to remain hidden from view of those who passed on the water.

Then came the moment when the British forces were put in motion, and the serious part of our work was begun. Three of the ships, and we came afterward to know that they were the Phœnix, the Rose, and the Greyhound, with two bomb-boats, put off from Staten Island early in the morning of the 22nd of August, and at the same time we could see troops going on board the unwieldy scows that had been building.

On that morning I had awakened just at break of day, and stood leisurely looking out from the mouth of the cave until, the vapors of the night lifting, showed this portion of the British fleet in motion. It can well be understood that I lost no time in arousing my companions.

"I reckon it's a case of settin' out for Red Hook

as soon as may be, lads!" I cried. "The Britishers are making a move."

Short though the time was before Abraham and Sam stood near me looking out over the water, the three ships had already gotten under way, and I believed we should set off on the instant to find Abel Grant, for this was that movement which we had been detailed to watch.

Fortunately Abraham had sharper wit, and when I excitedly urged that he start on the journey without a second's delay, he said, quietly pointing to the flatboats which were anchored off-shore and being rapidly filled with troops and guns:

"Wait until we see in which direction yonder red-coats are goin', for I reckon the general wants that information as well."

"Suppose I start off ahead to search for Abel Grant nearabout Gowanus bay, an' by the time he has pulled inshore you will most likely have come," Sam cried.

Abraham favored this proposition; but looked to me as the leader to give the word, and Sam set off at once.

Now it was reasonable to suppose that there were others who had been sent down by General Putnam for the purpose of giving timely warning of this movement; but that was no affair of ours, save that I burned to be the first who should arrive with the tidings, and waited with an impatience amounting almost to ill temper, until the ships that were under way came to an anchor in Gravesend bay, and Abraham said, as if well versed in all the arts of warfare:

"Now do we know the whole story, lad. I have

counted eighteen of yonder flatboats that, well filled with soldiers, are bein' brought out from their anchorage, an' these ships have come across to cover their landin'. Look! All the troops appear to be in motion; the encampment is broken up, an' we may count on it that within the next two or three hours the force yonder will be on Long Island."

Now he was as eager as I to be off, and, leaving all our little belongings in the cave, thinking only of getting on board the sloop in the shortest possible space of time, we set out at full speed, regardless of whether Tory eyes beheld us or not, striking straight across to Yellow Hook, and from there along the line of the shore so that we might catch the first glimpse of the Swiftsure.

"We've got a good wind for the voyage, and if so be our admiral don't delay us by havin' changed anchor-ground, we may possibly get ahead of any others who have been sent here for the same purpose as we," Abe cried eagerly as we ran.

That the Tories on the island were well aware of the intended movement we could well understand as we pressed forward swiftly, for we met parties of two or three coming out from the thicket in every direction, like flies who have scented molasses, and more than one of the scoundrels gave chase to us as if knowing on what errand we were bound; but our anxiety to be the first in New York with the news, as well as the fear of capture, lent such fleetness to our feet that pursuit would have been useless save by mounted men.

Fortune surely favored us in our efforts, for after passing the bend at Yellow Hook, leaving the highway on our right and keeping close to the edge of the shore, we saw the sloop standing down upon us,

while Sam was but a short distance away waving his cap vigorously.

Seth Hartley pushed off in the skiff, bringing us aboard when the sloop was well in, and we waded down into the water waist-deep to clamber on board, so that a few seconds of time might be saved.

Then, once alongside the Swiftsure, and even before the skiff had been made fast, Abel put the sloop about, headed for New York, while we jumped down on the halliards and set the canvas yet more smoothly, counting thus to get every ounce of wind that might come our way.

"I believe we're the first off," Abel said in a tone of exultation as he scanned the surrounding waters without seeing other craft nearabout. "By comin' down shore we've gained a good two hours an' a half of time, therefore you Minute Boys should make the best showing of all the spies that have been loiterin' on Long Island since the British fleet came into the bay!"

"And how many others, think you, have been engaged in the same task?" I asked.

"Well, judgin' from what I'd do if I was General Putnam, the shore must have been pretty thickly lined with them, because no dozen men could keep watch of all the likely landing-places."

The sloop was tended as never before since having been launched, and the helmsman did not allow his eyes to wander in any direction, but kept them on that point toward which we were headed, lest peradventure we might lose a few yards in distance that could otherwise have been saved.

The wind was abeam, and of sufficient strength to send the little craft through the water with a good-sized bone in her teeth, we all the while keep-

ing jealous watch for any who might be putting out from the island.

When we were come off Governor's Island the men in the fortification there, seeing us straining every effort to get the best speed out of our craft, must have guessed somewhat of our purpose, and would have brought us to, that we might answer their questions. We were not minded, however, to tell of what we had seen to any save General Putnam, and kept on our way, evidently much to their anger, for one man went so far as to point a gun at Abel Grant, shouting words we could not distinguish, but which were probably an order for us to heave to without delay.

"It'll take more'n a musket ball to stop this 'ere craft," Abel Grant said laughing, and verily I believe the possibility of danger only served to raise his spirits.

It was low tide when we crossed the river, running the course from the outermost end of Governor's Island to the battery on Bowling Green as straight as might be, and then it was possible for us to see the long spikes driven in the booms of logs, making a regular set of porcupine quills, which were anchored just below the surface to prevent the enemy from getting up to the city on that side.

We did not give much heed to them at the time, for our desires outran even the speed of the sloop, and at risk of staving the bow in, Abel Grant run her up to the bulkhead in front of the battery, I leaping ashore at the very moment she struck.

Arrived at headquarters, breathless and excited, boiling with the hope that I was the first to bring the news, it was as if no sentry had been placed there, for I failed to hear the man challenge me when I

darted past to enter the building, but before he could overtake me, for he did not dare to shoot, I had forced open the outer door, and an instant later stood in front of General Putnam.

He was busily engaged with three other officers; but instead of losing his temper because of my unceremonious entrance, asked hurriedly as he leaped to his feet:

"Has the enemy begun to make a landing?"

"Ay, sir, and in Gravesend bay. We waited long enough to see three ships and two bomb-boats coming to anchor just off the shore, an' no less than twenty flatboats filled with soldiers had left their moorings, bein' towed across. The other scows were takin' the men as fast as possible."

"How long since this was begun?"

"We saw the first movement at daybreak; but waited until the ships had come to anchor in the bay before leavin'."

"How does it happen that you have been able to get here so quickly?" the general asked, much as if misdoubting the correctness of my report.

Hurriedly I explained why we were enabled to get aboard the sloop so quickly, and as for the possibilities of our making the trip in quick time, he could see for himself by glancing out at the trees which were bending under the weight of the fresh breeze.

"You have done well, my lad. Where is your sloop now?"

"Just here at the battery bulkhead, sir, an' all our company are aboard."

"Hold her there until you get further orders from Lieutenant Winterbottom. How many men will she carry?"

"Thirty, perhaps, if you stow them snugly, and are not afraid of overloadin'."

The general turned his back on me to speak with the officers at the table, and I waited, not knowing whether the interview was at an end, mayhap four or five minutes, when in the midst of giving hurried orders to the aides who came pouring in as if well aware of what news I brought, he chanced to see me again, when he said in a friendly tone; but speaking so rapidly as to show he had no time to waste:

"You may go to your sloop, lad. There is nothing further to be said until you hear from me again."

I hurried out, and was no more than in the open air when the sentry whom I had eluded caught me by the collar, as he asked sharply:

"Are the British landed, lad?"

I was in doubt as to whether it was right to satisfy his curiosity, and he, understanding why I delayed in answering, shook me playfully, as he said:

"There can be no harm done by your talkin', if such be the case, for it must all be known in a few minutes."

"They are comin' ashore at Gravesend bay," I replied, and as he released his hold I ran across the Green, avoiding as best I might those men who would have stopped me, for it appeared that all who were nearabout when I ran so swiftly to headquarters, had an inkling of what was my purpose.

The sloop was made fast to the bulkhead when I gained the water's edge, and not less than an hundred stood nearby, nearly all of them soldiers in uniform, who were questioning my comrades as to the cause of our coming.

Abel had refused to answer any questions what-

soever until he saw by my return that our report had been made, and then he gratified the curiosity of the by-standers in so far as he believed was right.

Before half an hour had passed we learned that troops had been sent over to the island day after day until the greater portion of our army was ready to meet the invader; but there yet remained so many in New York that the wonder to me was how they might be ferried across, until I saw the whale-boats, skiffs, sloops, and every kind of a craft that could be mustered, gathering nearabout where we were moored.

All was bustle and seeming confusion for an hour or more, and then as rapidly as might be these boats which had been gathered so suddenly, and it seemed to me mysteriously until I learned that the greater number of them had been kept under waiting orders, were loaded to the gunwales one by one with men, after which they set off for the opposite shore without heed to either military or naval formation.

Then Lieutenant Winterbottom came down hurriedly with orders for us to pull around to Peck's Slip, and wait there for General Putnam and his staff.

"Their horses have already been taken across in a flatboat, therefore you will have no difficulty in ferrying them. Once they are landed, the orders are that the sloop ply back and forth carrying whosoever may apply for passage, and this you are to do so long as any soldiers remain on this side desiring to cross."

When we had worked the sloop around to the slip we saw nearby fifteen or twenty casks of seabread, made of pease meal, hard as flint, and I noticed that as each man passed he took as many as

could be carried conveniently, whereupon I asked Abel Grant if he believed such as that was the only food our soldiers would carry with them.

"It's a good deal more'n some of 'em will want within an hour after the battle has been opened," he said grimly, and, strange though it may seem, this remark of his caused me to realize more keenly than I had done since we banded ourselves together as Minute Boys, that we were about to know the meaning of the word "war."

Even here at Peck's Slip were other boats being laden with heavy, living cargoes, and as each craft started the men on board cheered lustily as if bound on some pleasure excursion, while I asked myself with an inward shudder how many might be alive or dead when the sun had set.

General Putnam and his staff arrived very shortly after we were ready to receive them. Once they had been taken across we found ourselves with ample work to do, for no sooner had we ferried one load than another was ready to be taken on board, and all the while we expected each instant to hear the booming of cannon which would tell that the battle had begun.

Not until night had fully come were we done with our task as ferrymen, and then was the sloop tied up at Peck's Slip, for we had no further word as to what might be expected of us.

Lieutenant Winterbottom had gone over with General Putnam, and all the order he gave was such as has already been set down here, therefore we were in no little bewilderment as to our proper course of action.

"Accordin' to my reckonin' we're bound to lay here till mornin', an' then if so be there are left any

soldiers to go across, we'll continue the work," Abel Grant said by way of ending the discussion which had arisen among us. "If the lieutenant wants us, failin' to find the sloop on the other side, he's got sense enough to understand she would be here, therefore can he get us word whenever it pleases him."

We were standing on deck while speculating as to what should be done, and I called the attention of my comrades to the number of people on the street, saying:

"After so many have crossed, it would seem as if there could not be a man left in the town."

"I'm allowin' that pretty nigh all here are them as hope the red-coats will swallow us up as completely as the whale did Jonah, for it stands to reason that every able-bodied man who wanted to, an' could, get away, would be on yonder shore, knowin' as all our people must that every arm is needed," Abel Grant said, and I fancied for an instant that he was reproving us Minute Boys for thus playing the part of ferrymen when we should be carrying muskets.

"No, no, I don't mean that, lad," he said quickly when I put into words my thoughts. "You are already in the service, an' actin' under orders, consequently, as I look at the matter, have no right to leave this 'ere sloop until word has been given. It makes an honest man's blood boil to see so many who should be defendin' their homes, walkin' to and fro with the hope that the enemy can do as he pleases."

"There are two who can't at all events," Sam said with a laugh, "an' they are Luther Stedman an' Ezra Billings. I wonder how those precious

Tories are enjoyin' themselves about this time?"

"It may be they'll gain their liberty sooner than we count on, for if the British take this town they will of course set free such as them," I began, and stopped very suddenly at that point, for not above an hundred paces distant, walking along the water front as if searching for some one, was none other than Luther Stedman himself!

So amazed was I at the knowledge that he whom we had believed was being kept where he could do no further mischief, had liberty to walk the streets, that I stood in open-mouthed astonishment staring at him, and one by one my companions followed the direction of my gaze, each in turn giving vent to an exclamation of anger and of astonishment.

Whether the villainous cur saw us or not I am unable to say, although in view of what happened am I inclined to the belief that he recognized the sloop even before we were aware of his presence. Certain it is, however, that he walked leisurely along the street, ceasing now to gaze on either side, but apparently intent only on gaining such exercise as might be possible from a leisurely stroll, and we four, for Seth Hartley joined with us in our indignation, watched the fellow until he was lost to view in the distance, when Abel Grant cried in a tone of anger:

"It seems that such high and mighty officers as Lieutenant Winterbottom have little care whether common people like us come to grief or not! It was no more work for him to keep those Tories in jail than to set them free, an' the wonder of it is that we were not attacked while on duty at the Narrows."

"But why did he allow them their liberty?" I asked, and Abel replied bitterly:

"Because there are some in this 'ere army of ours who don't attend to their duty."

We were too thoroughly stupefied to discuss the matter, and as if with one accord went below, where we sat in silence for an hour or more, until Abel Grant said curtly:

"If there's a cook aboard this 'ere craft, I'm thinkin' we'd best have somethin' to eat, for if work is to be done to-morrow we must turn in an' get a bit of rest."

My heart was very bitter when I lay down in the bunk that night, and the thought that Lieutenant Winterbottom, who had seemingly been a friend, should have so far neglected us as to allow these Tories their liberty at a time when they might do us grievous injury, kept slumber from my eyelids until a late hour.

Next morning at the break of day we were hailed by the sergeant in command of a squad of men, who claimed to have direct orders from the lieutenant that they be taken across to Brooklyn in the sloop, and from that hour until the sun set again we had little opportunity to dwell upon our fancied wrongs.

And yet during all this day, when it had seemed as if we were on the eve of battle, no sound was heard betokening activity of the enemy.

Had I not seen them with my own eyes, I should have doubted whether the information that they were landed could have been correct, and even as it was I questioned whether they might not have gone back, until late in the afternoon while we were lying on Long Island side, some of our people told

of a skirmish that had taken place near Bennett's Cove, when four Americans were wounded.

It was not an engagement in any sense of the word; but blood had been spilled, and those who, like myself, were beginning to question whether the enemy intended to make an attack, no longer doubted but that the critical time must be near at hand.

We did not see Lieutenant Winterbottom during this day; but just at nightfall a messenger came from Flatbush Pass with an order from the lieutenant that we moor the sloop off the ferry-landing on the Brooklyn side, there to await further commands.

This same man told us that there had been some skirmishing between our advance guard and those of the British; that Colonel Marton of the New Jersey Levies had been seriously wounded, and Master Rutgers, whom all us lads knew well, was killed.

When we had anchored our boat in accordance with the commands received, perhaps fifty yards from the shore, and were all thoroughly tired with the exercise of working the craft from early dawn without a moment for rest, save such as could be had while we were standing to and fro across the river, Abel Grant said as if it was a matter of not overly much importance:

"I'm allowin' that all hands can't afford to turn in to-night; no one may say when the bloomin' Britishers will take it into their heads to make an attack, an' it would be a pretty kettle of fish if we should be found asleep when most sorely needed."

"There's no need of so many words about it, if you count on our standin' guard from now till

mornin'," Abraham said petulantly, and as a matter of fact the temper of our crew had been sorely tried that day by the fault-finding of those who called themselves soldiers, and yet had never smelled burning powder. "Say what you want done, an' we'll come up to the scratch."

"Then I'm allowin' that Seth an' I'll stand our trick from now until midnight. Ephraim an' Abe are to take the next turn until four o'clock, when Sam, who professes to be the cook, shall come on an' make breakfast ready."

It was a matter of indifference to me, this setting a watch. I did not believe any such precaution was needed, yet at the same time had no intention of running counter to the admiral's plans when they concerned the handling of the sloop.

I was dissatisfied with myself because we three lads, who had counted so eagerly on being able to do important work as Minute Boys, were come down to playing ferrymen for a lot of half-baked soldiers who had more of insolence than patriotism in their hearts, and when Sam accused me of being sore-headed, I told him that which was in my mind, whereupon he said laughingly:

"I'm allowin' we lads have considerable to learn about war, an' perhaps we shall yet have all the chance we want of bein' shot at. Yesterday mornin' it seemed certain to me that a battle was comin' off within an hour or two, an' up to this time, except for a couple of skirmishes, nothin' has been done. Our turn will come later."

"Yes, when there's no opportunity to win any honor," I said bitterly, and then threw myself down in the bunk refusing to speak another word.

Half an hour later, perhaps, Abraham and Sam

followed my example, and, seeing that we had composed ourselves for sleep, Abel Grant and Seth went on deck, there to keep what I believed to be a useless watch.

Because of the dissatisfaction in my mind concerning the release of the Tories and our being made to play so poor a part when we should have been in the field as soldiers, slumber did not come readily to my eyelids, and it must have been well to midnight before I finally lost myself in Dreamland, only to be aroused a moment later, as it seemed to me, by a noise as if of a terrible struggle on deck, wherein men were striving for the mastery, or for life.

CHAPTER XI.

THE ATTACK.

THE noise of the conflict on deck, for conflict it surely was, had aroused Abraham at about the same moment I was brought to a realization that there was trouble afoot, and he stood staring stupidly around, not having shaken off the unconsciousness of slumber when I ran against him in my haste.

"What is it?" Sam asked, suddenly rising in his bunk, and I replied while grouping around in the darkness for something which would serve as a weapon:

"There's trouble on deck, an' no time to be lost here talkin' about it."

The first object with which my hand came in contact was the unloaded musket that had been laid on top of the stores so it might not come to harm, and with this held by the muzzle, in order to use it as a club, I ran out of the cuddy, finding it difficult for an instant to understand what was going on. It seemed to me as if the deck and cockpit of the sloop were thronged with people, all of whom appeared to be fighting desperately, and, at the same time, as nearly in silence as was possible.

I could distinguish no face; make out no familiar form for several seconds, and as I stood there with

the musket half-upraised, Sam pushed past me into the very thick of the gathering.

Quicker witted than I, the lad had understood in an instant what should be done, and went as if led by instinct to the spot where he was most needed.

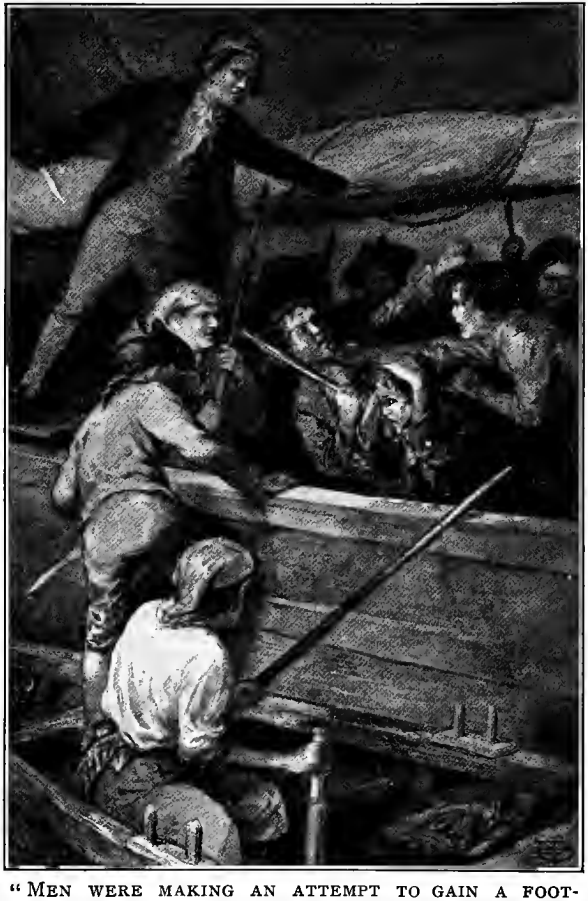
I saw him pick up from the deck as he ran what appeared to be a capstan-bar belonging to some large vessel, and swinging this about his head even as I stood there gazing about stupidly, he brought it down upon the skull of a fellow who, with a naked knife between his teeth, was at that instant coming over the rail to add to the press of numbers which had already seemingly taken possession of our vessel.

Then it was that I became able to distinguish the different forms in the darkness, and saw that from two boats alongside men were making an attempt to gain a foothold on the Swiftsure's deck, although there was no further room for a single one.

Then I made out the figures of Abel and Sam standing back to back, the first using the tiller as a weapon, and the other fighting back with bare knuckles two ruffians who were close upon him with knives.

By this time I had gathered myself sufficiently to be able to render some service, and brought down the butt of the musket upon one scoundrel's head with such force that I could count on his being out of the battle many hours to come, if not forever.

The one thought in my mind was that the British had taken our people in Brooklyn by surprise, and this intended capture of the sloop was but a portion of their plan of action. There was fierce delight in my heart at the idea of thus being able to strike a blow against the red-coats, when it had seemed as



"MEN WERE MAKING AN ATTEMPT TO GAIN A FOOT-HOLD ON THE SWIFTSURE'S DECK."

if the orders given by Lieutenant Winterbottom ruled us out of any honorable share of the work.

After this it would be impossible for me to set down of my own knowledge all that occurred during the next ten or fifteen minutes, for I knew little else save the fact that I was straining every nerve and muscle to beat back those who had already boarded the sloop, and at the same time prevent others from taking their places.

We were beset on either side and from the bow, showing that no less than three boat-loads of scoundrels had come to overpower our crew of five, and this in itself was sufficient to lend me fictitious strength, at the same time that it took away in a measure all sense of pain, or of fear, when I was struck, as frequently happened, heavy blows upon the body which had missed my head.

And during all this time our enemy had fought silently; but it did not occur to me as strange until the thought came that they feared to make a noise lest our friends on shore should hear and come to the rescue, and yet, if it was a party of British whom we were opposing, how could they have put off while we were at anchor without first having overcome those Americans who were stationed near the ferry-way?

I made no outcry, simply because it did not occur to me that it would be of any avail to raise my voice, so firmly was it fixed in my mind that we were entirely cut off from our friends.

There was little time to speculate upon anything of this kind. That which I have set down ran through my mind rather as the lightning flashes through black clouds, and is gone on the instant.

During every moment I was obliged to exert all

my skill and strength to save my life, for these fellows who had come aboard were bent on killing, and that seemed their first purpose, even though the capture of the sloop might be the secondary reason for the attack.

Once I beat off with the butt of the musket a man who had a knife so near my heart that the skin was cut ever so slightly, and yet until the battle was over I had no idea the weapon had even penetrated my clothing.

At almost the same moment another member of the gang came lurching forward as if bent only on my downfall, and as I wheeled to receive him, swinging the gun sideways because there was no time to raise it above my head, I saw before me the villainous face of Luther Stedman. Then did I understand in a twinkling the meaning of the attack, of the silence which had been preserved throughout the fight, and of the eagerness to put an end to us; but I did not realize at that moment why he had brought so many for so slight a task.

As our eyes met I believed the fellow had been searching for me, although one would not have supposed that, on so small a field as the deck of the Swiftsure, he would have been forced to hunt about many seconds. I saw, even amid the gloom, an expression of satisfaction come over his face, and I clutched the musket yet more firmly, supposing he was about to attack me.

He proved himself to be the veriest cur, however, for instead of tackling me himself, and we were about evenly matched in respect to weight and height, the cowardly Tory backed to the starboard rail. where he called for some of his following who

yet remained in one of the boats alongside, to come aboard that he might show them the one who was to be especially cared for.

It seemed therefore that I was the one member of the sloop's crew Luther Stedman was particularly looking for, and I did not need to be told that if he ever again succeeded in getting me in his power, I would suffer to the full extent of his ability because of having twice got the better of him or his plans. Even at the moment when all was turmoil, and those whom Luther had summoned were coming in over the rail to attack me, I asked myself for the second time how it was he had succeeded in regaining his liberty when common prudence demanded that he be held in custody, at least during such time as we Minute Boys were spying upon the British fleet.

As Luther's hirelings rushed upon me, I yelled, not in the hope of attracting assistance, for I had no idea any were near who would lend us a hand, but to warn my comrades that the Tory was one of the assailants, and it was as if in a twinkling my cries changed the tide of battle.

Seth Hartley came up with an answering shout, swinging a paddle which he must have taken from the punt, and with every sweep of his weapon one or more of the enemy were knocked into the water.

By this means, and before I had had time to strike a single blow in my own defense, he cleared the deck immediately in front of me, and then, thrusting the paddle into my hands, he seized the musket, running with it into the cabin.

I was wholly at a loss to understand the meaning of this move on his part, and just for an instant be-

lieved he had turned tail at the very moment when he could be of the most assistance; but there was scant opportunity for speculation. Luther Stedman had brought with him a large force, counting on making a clean job of it, and no sooner was one put out of the fight than it seemed as if half a dozen took his place.

It was necessary for me to use the paddle to the best of my ability, so closely did they press me instantly Seth had disappeared; but despite all my efforts I could not come within striking distance of Luther Stedman. That cowardly Tory was taking good care of his own precious skin, and had no intention of running any unnecessary risks.

In reading over what I have just set down, I find it has been made to appear as if I was the only member of the sloop's crew who took any part in the defense, and yet such is far from being the truth. My comrades were fighting desperately, and I have not attempted to tell what they did simply because I had no means of knowing. I was dimly conscious that every one of our party except Seth, who appeared to be skulking in the cabin, was resisting the attack to the best of his strength, and without regard to personal danger; but the foe so far outnumbered us that we could not rally to a common place of defense.

It was at the very moment when I had been felled to the deck by a cowardly blow delivered from behind while I was grappling with a fellow who pressed me hard, that the report of a musket rang in my ears as if the weapon had been discharged within an inch of my head, and a shriek of pain followed it.

"Get forward here, lads!" I heard Seth cry,

"It is not for us to fight with sticks at such a time as this!"

Even while scrambling to my feet, for the enemy had fallen back very suddenly at the discharge of the musket, I understood why Seth had gone into the cuddy. He knew that plenty of ammunition for the musket could be found there, and was not minded to fight bare-handed any longer.

A second report and a second yell of pain came while the enemy stood for the instant undecided, as if surprised at knowing we had deadly weapons on board, and a full half of Luther's cowardly following went over the rail into the water. They could fight with apparent energy while believing we were the same as defenseless, but at the first show that we had the means of inflicting serious injury, their small spark of courage fled.

Abel Grant, with Sam and Abraham, had been forced aft, separated from Seth and me by the foe, and now they came toward the cuddy-hatch with a yell of triumph, sweeping two more of the gang overboard, while I cried out for them to take care lest Luther escape us, when came a third shot and the battle was over.

The last of the Tory crew who were able to do so had taken to the water, less afraid of being drowned than shot, leaving behind two who were too badly wounded to admit of flight.

"We are allowin' Luther to get away scot free!" I cried in a rage, running aft to leap into the punt that I might set off in pursuit, and Abel, instead of seconding my efforts, stood like a statue, as he repeated stupidly:

"Luther! He can't be here, 'cause he's on the other side of the river!"

"But he *is* here!" I screamed angrily. "I came face to face with the sneakin' villain, an' surely should be able to recognize him!"

"Did he an' Ezra both get out of jail?" Sam cried, and all on board remained stupidly staring at me, without making any effort toward aiding me make ready the boat, thus giving the Tories ample opportunity to make their escape.

From the sound of oars in the distance I understood that those who had made the attack were too far away by this time to warrant our going in pursuit, and, inwardly raging because my comrades had allowed their astonishment to shut off all possibility of our capturing any of the miscreants save the two who lay on the sloop's deck wounded, I went toward the cabin-hatch to relieve my feelings by harsh words, when a voice from the shore was heard:

"Ahoy on the sloop! Answer or we'll open fire!"

"Ahoy!" I shouted, and now it was my turn to be astonished almost to the verge of stupidity, for I had not believed there were any near at hand on the shore save it might be Britishers.

"What craft is that?"

"The sloop Swiftsure."

"What has been going on out there?" the voice cried, and I believed I recognized it as Lieutenant Winterbottom's.

"A gang attempted to work mischief, an' came precious near succeedin'," I replied, once more allowing anger to get the better of me as I realized that Luther Stedman and his following had escaped much the same as scot free, for I did not

count the wounded sufficient in number to be a fair punishment for what would have been done save for Seth's quick wit.

"Why didn't you answer our hail?" the voice from the shore asked sharply.

"Did you cry out before?"

"Ay, a dozen times. Do you know who made the attack? Were they soldiers or sailors?"

"Neither; but a party of Tories led by one Luther Stedman."

"Have they escaped?"

"There are two on board too badly wounded to be able to help themselves. The greater number must have gone away in boats, an' it stands to reason that some are ashore, or tryin' to get there, for more than one leaped overboard at the report of our musket."

Then we heard the command for the guard to turn out, and soon the hum of voices told that soldiers were searching here and there along the shore for those who had attacked us.

Now we understood why Luther and his following had fought so silently. They were doubtless aware that some of our force was encamped close by, and knew their purpose must be accomplished without noise if it was to succeed.

Five minutes later came the sound of oars near at hand, and when Abel Grant hailed it was Lieutenant Winterbottom who replied, saying in a business-like tone as he came aboard:

"We will send the wounded ashore, for I'm thinking you do not care to have them here."

Until this moment we had given no heed to the fellows who lay in the cockpit, and our neglect of

them was not due to wanton brutality; but rather because we were so mixed in mind as to be really incapable of acting like sane people.

Abel Grant brought the sloop's lantern and lighted it that we might have a view of their faces; but we failed of recognizing them, and I said bitterly when the lieutenant's men were dressing the wounds roughly, preparatory to putting the fellows aboard the small boat:

"It is as I thought! Luther Stedman recruited his force from among the idlers on the shore who are ready for anythin' that promises an opportunity for plunder. If —"

"Why do you continue to say it was Luther Stedman who led the attack?" the lieutenant asked in a tone of irritation, as if repetition of the name annoyed him. "That Tory is safe in jail, and will remain there for some days to come."

"That is where he should be," I replied hotly; "but since he an' I came face to face, you must allow that I would not be likely to make any mistake as to the scoundrel. That which most interests me is, how he had a chance to do this thing!"

"It not only interests *me,* but I'm thinking General Putnam will insist on an explanation," and now the lieutenant spoke gravely, as if believing the matter to be very serious. "The orders were for him to be detained a certain time, and that he is at liberty shows we have another traitor among our people. You lads shall know all I may be able to learn — that is," he added with an odd break in his voice, "if I am in condition to give information to any one at this time to-morrow."

I failed of understanding what he meant; but Sam, not so stupid, asked in a low tone:

"Is it certain that a battle will be fought very soon, sir?"

"The British will undoubtedly open the attack by daylight to-morrow, and with the odds in their favor. I have been sent here to make certain the enemy does not attempt to land a force in our rear."

"An' what are we lads to do while the soldiers are fightin'?" I asked, for it seemed to me that we had already given such account of ourselves that we should be entitled to do the work of men.

"You are to remain here in charge of the sloop. If so be the battle goes against us, you will be sorely needed," the lieutenant replied gravely, and I added with more of insistence than was seemly in a lad:

"But there are four of us who can do as good work with muskets as those twice our age, an' it surely seems as if we should be allowed the opportunity."

"Not when you can be of greater service elsewhere. Be content to obey orders, as soldiers should, remembering that this coming battle will not be the only one we colonists must be called upon to fight before the king has been made to understand that we count on struggling for our rights so long as a corporal's guard is left alive. Your turn will come later, lads."

By this time the soldiers had made ready to remove the wounded men, and, much to my relief, we of the sloop were not called upon to aid in the gruesome task of putting them on board the boat.

Then came two terrible days for us — terrible

because we lay idle off the ferry, not daring to go on shore owing to the orders Lieutenant Winterbottom had given, and wholly ignorant of what was being done, save that we knew full well a battle had been fought and our people got the worst of it, although the greater portion of them held their own in the fortifications.

During all this time we remained on board the sloop, never venturing to go on shore even for a single moment lest we should be needed, as the lieutenant had suggested, and then a young fellow who did not appear to be more than twenty years old, hailed us from the shore at about five o'clock in the afternoon, asking that we come in the punt and take him aboard.

"I have here a written order from Lieutenant Winterbottom," he said, when I had explained that our instructions were to remain at anchor until receiving some positive command from General Putnam or one of his staff.

It can well be fancied that we went for him with a rush on hearing this, for now, after so long and terrible a time of waiting did it seem as if we might learn the truth of what had been done, and because I cannot tell the story as well as did he, I propose to set down the tale exactly as he told it to us immediately we brought him on board.

His name was James Martin, and he had come to New York with the Connecticut troops to aid in the defense of the town when it was known that the Britishers were counting to make an attack upon our people.

Martin had an ugly wound in the shoulder which, fortunately, had already been dressed by a surgeon, and the written word he brought from Lieutenant

Winterbottom was to the effect that we take him aboard and remain on the alert, for we would have work in plenty before midnight.

"Does that mean we are to carry soldiers back to the town?" I asked, and Martin replied:

"I have no idea what is to be done. Some believe General Washington counts on beatin' a retreat, while others are of the opinion that we are to make a try at gettin' over Gravesend bay way, so that we may take the enemy in the rear."

"S'posen you tell us all you know about the business from the time you set out for Long Island?" Abel Grant said, and it can well be understood that we were eager enough to hear the story; but, in order that we might not miss seeing or hearing the first messenger who should come to us, we gathered in the blood-stained cockpit, where Martin was made as comfortable as possible. And here is the story he told, set down exactly as we heard it from his lips:

"It seemed a good deal like sport to come up to New York from New Haven, and a grand time some of us had until the afternoon when we were ordered to march down to the ferry to take boat for Long Island.

"Of course we expected something of the kind, especially after hearing that the British had landed on the island, but I didn't feel overly comfortable in mind at the idea of snuffing gunpowder when bullets were mixed with it. However, I held my tongue, went to quarters, packed my belongings, and got myself in readiness for a move as soon as possible.

"When we had marched to the ferry I saw several casks of sea-bread, which was nearly as hard

as musket-flints, and heard our captain give the word for us to take as many as we could carry comfortably. As good luck would have it, we made a short halt before the boats came up, and I filled the bosom of my shirt with the hard biscuits, also taking as many as could be carried in my hands, putting these last in my knapsack while we were going across.

"After landing at Brooklyn we marched up the hill from the ferry, and had not got very far when we began to meet wounded men, some with broken legs, and some with broken heads. Sights like those made me feel mighty uncomfortable; but I held my peace lest my comrades should think me a coward. After marching three or four miles we were halted to give us a chance to gnaw at the flinty biscuit, which were enough to break the teeth of a rat.

"Before we had finished the not overly pleasing meal, a squad of British came up through the thicket and engaged fifty or more of our Connecticut troops, and it didn't make a fellow feel very comfortable in mind, knowing that within a short time he also would march up to be shot at.

"The skirmish was short-lived, and then we were ordered to march once more. After traveling about half a mile we came upon a small party of artillerymen dragging a heavy twelve-pounder on a field-carriage, the wheels of which sank deep in the sandy soil. They pleaded hard for some one to help them haul the piece. Our officers gave no heed to their entreaties, but urged us forward towards a creek, where a large party of Americans and British were engaged.

"By the time we arrived the enemy had driven

our men into the creek, or, perhaps, you might call it a mill-pond, and such as could swim got across, while those who could not, and who failed of finding anything to buoy them up, went to the bottom. The British had three or four field-pieces stationed near a brick house, and these were pouring cannister and grape into our people like showers of hail. Many more would have been killed but for the twelve-pounder, which, being got in position, opened such a fire that the red-coats were forced to shift their quarters.

"In this section was a regiment of Maryland troops, all young men. It was truly a pitiful sight when they came out of the water and mud, looking rather like rats than human beings. Many of them were killed while swimming across the pond, and more were drowned. When the tide went down some of our regiment waded into the water and took out a number of corpses, as well as a great many muskets that had been lost or deliberately thrown into the creek. Our regiment lay on the ground we then occupied, during that night.

"Next afternoon we had a pretty tight scratch with about our own number of British, all of which came about rather oddly. A few of our boys went across the creek on what had become our regular business, that is, in search of something to eat. There was a field of corn a short distance off, with several cocks of hay about half-way from the creek to the cornfield. Our boys counted on getting some of the corn, or anything else that might be eatable. When they had got as far as the hay-cocks they were fired upon by the British, who were hidden in the cornfield.

"Our boys took to the hay, and the red-coats to

the fence, from which positions a number of shots were exchanged, neither side being willing to give way. Finally about forty of our people charged, driving the British from the fence, and, more redcoats coming up just then, our fellows were driven back in turn. Each side kept receiving reinforcements, until we had our entire regiment in action, and the enemy mustered about as many; but after a hard tussle we succeeded in routing them, yet did not dare to follow when they retreated, for fear of falling into some snare. We lost in all — both killed and wounded — about thirty.

"Our regiment was alone, no other troops being near where we were lying. We had halted on rising ground covered with a young growth of trees, and a goodly number of these we felled to throw up such a fence as would prevent the approach of the enemy's horse. Near night a heavy shower came up, which wet us all to the skin, and damaged our ammunition so much that when the storm cleared away we were ordered to parade and discharge our pieces that they might be recharged. We attempted to fire by platoons for improvement, but made blundering work of it; it was more like a running fire. However, we got our muskets as empty as our stomachs, and with half the trouble, nor was it difficult to reload them, for we had the wherewithal to do that, but not so with our stomachs.

"Just at dusk I, with one or two others of our company, went to a barn about half a mile away to get some straw, for the ground was drenched with the rain. It was quite dark in the building, and while I was fumbling around on the floor some one called from the top of the mow, asking who

we were. I told him, and he asked if there had not been a battle nearby; said he and his mates had heard the firing, and crept in there to save their lives. They had heard us when we discharged our muskets in order to reload them, and believed the barn to be entirely surrounded by the enemy. We never let on that the Britishers hadn't been there; but, gathering up some sheaves of wheat, went back to the regiment. From the number of voices I heard, it is safe to say there were not less than a dozen skulking in the barn, and if they didn't succeed in mustering up any more courage, it's likely they'll stay there tilll the red-coats gather 'em in, as should be done to those who show the white feather so handily.

"When I got back to where our regiment was stationed, I found the men under arms ready to march away, so I dropped the wheat sheaves which had cost so much in the way of time, picked up my musket, and fell into line. We were ordered not to speak, or even to cough, while on the march. All orders were given in whispers, being repeated from officer to officer down the line, and we were started off in the direction of the ferry, wondering much as to the meaning of it all. Hardly was our regiment in motion, when your lieutenant came up and ordered me to fall out in order to make a short cut for the shore here, to warn you that much work would be called for this night."

The soldier ceased speaking as if his story had come to an end, and I, who had failed to hear whatsoever of a real battle, asked impatiently:

"Hasn't there been a fight here on the island?"

"Bless you, yes," he replied. "Our people have been fighting here, there and everywhere; but I

reckon you'll find, if our commanders allow that a big battle has been fought, that it was cut up in little pieces, same's I've been telling about."

"I can't see that it makes any particular difference to this 'ere organization whether it has been a pitched battle, or a lot of skirmishes," Abel Grant said as if giving words to his thoughts. "The upshot of it all is that the Americans are whipped, an' are now retreatin'."

"Who said they were whipped?" Sam asked angrily.

"This 'ere soldier has told us much the same thing, an' 'less we're dummies, we don't need to be told that troops are retreatin' when they move softly away in obedience to whispered orders. Besides, the lieutenant has said the same when he tells about hard work for this night. I'm only the admiral of the fleet; but if I was in command of the land forces, I'd be makin' ready to get back inter runnin' a ferry."

There was no good reason why we should dispute over the meaning of James Martin's story. We knew well enough that some disaster had befallen our people, and after all we had seen of the enemy's strength, it really did not seem strange the king's forces should have come out best, they being entitled to do so by sheer press of numbers.

The one question I wanted settled was as to how we could do anything toward making ready for the work before us, save by remaining on the alert, and, lest the others should know how thoroughly ignorant I was, I asked advice of our prisoner.

"It wouldn't do any harm to warp in a bit nearer the shore," Seth replied, speaking in a low tone, for he understood that I did not care the others

should know I had been seeking advice. "Then it stands you in hand to feed the company, for I'm thinkin' that when our work begins there'll be scant time for eatin' till it's over."

"Then you believe our people are beatin' a retreat?" I asked.

"There can be no other meanin' to the story the recruit has been tellin', an' now has come the time when you lads may do better service for your Cause than if you stood in the trenches with a musket a full week at a stretch. The work now is to save your army, an' you with your boat can do more than could be effected with all the American muskets on the island."

CHAPTER XII.

THE RETREAT.

ALTHOUGH Seth Hartley had not said very much, I understood exactly what he meant, and verily do I believe there was no other on the sloop who could have aided me in pulling myself together as did our prisoner — the lobster-back whom we had stolen from the British fleet.

As if the idea was one that had just come into my mind, I gave the word that the sloop should be warped as near inshore as the depth of water would permit, and at the same time warned Sam that he had better be getting about his duties as cook.

"If so be we must play ferry-boat again, we'll be in shape for the work," I said, putting on such a swagger as I thought should be worn by the captain of Minute Boys. "He who fights an' runs away may live to fight another day, so the old song says, an' I dare venture to say that's what General Washington has got in his mind when he orders a retreat. We'll see our people forcin' the Britishers back before we're many days older, an' now all we've got to do is help the Americans off the island."

I saw Abraham looking at me out of the tail of his eye, and knew he was trying to make out

why I was become such a swashbuckler so suddenly; but never a word in the way of explanation did I offer, and very likely it is a mystery to Abe Decker even to this day.

However, my orders were carried out very promptly, and within another hour we were ready for whatsoever might be required. Indeed our preparations had been made none too soon, for Abel Grant had not yet had time to light his pipe before the foremost of the retreating army could be seen even amid the gloom.

And now am I minded to hasten over the events of this night, even though in all the time I have lived I can recall nothing more stirring and like to warm the blood of those who have the good of the Cause at heart. If I spend the time necessary to the story, then must I leave untold the details of our next encounter with Luther Stedman, therefore it is that I will set down here what I saw printed a long while after that eventful night, for we who called ourselves Minute Boys, our prisoner, Seth Hartley, and James Martin, the wounded soldier, had no other part in all the dangerous enterprise than to keep the sloop moving from shore to shore as rapidly as possible.

By setting down here the words of another, as I did while telling the soldier's story, we shall come to the part we lads played, all the more quickly, and he who does not care to read may pass it over, if, peradventure, the doings of my comrades and myself are more pleasing.

"With twenty thousand men the English advanced on the American position by different roads, and in the early morning of August 27th, they encountered the Americans whom Putnam had sent

out under Sullivan, who had taken the place of Greene, owing to the illness of the latter.

"Sullivan was first attacked by a large body of Hessians under Von Heister, and scarcely had the fight begun when he was assailed in the rear by the main force. Between two galling fires, it was not possible for the Americans to hold their ground, and nearly the whole force, including the commander, were made prisoners of war.

"Another division of fifteen hundred American troops, under Lord Stirling, was now assaulted by General Grant, and a little later by Cornwallis. After four hours of desperate resistance, Stirling succeeded in getting his men across a marshy stream to a place of safety, while he himself was taken prisoner, and the struggle known as the Battle of Long Island was over. About four hundred had been killed and wounded on each side, and the British had taken some eleven hundred prisoners.

"An evacuation of Long Island, and a retreat to New York, was the resolve of a council of war. The fog still rested heavily upon the island, the harbor, and the adjacent city, like a shield of the Almighty to cover the patriots from the peril of discovery. Although lying within a few hundred yards of the American lines, the enemy had no suspicion of the movement.

"At eight o'clock in the evening the patriot regiments were silently paraded, the soldiers ignorant of the intent; but, owing to delay on account of unfavorable wind, and some confusion in orders, it was near midnight when the embarkation commenced at the ferry stairs, foot of Fulton Street, Brooklyn. For six hours soldiers and volunteers plied their muffled oars, and boat after boat, filled

with the champions of freedom, touched at the various wharves from Fulton ferry to Whitehall, and left their precious burdens.

"At six in the morning nine thousand men, with their baggage and munitions, except heavy artillery, had crossed. Mifflin with his Pennsylvania battalions and the remains of the regiments of Smallwood and Haslet, formed the covering party, and Washington and his staff, who had been in the saddle all night, remained until the last company had embarked. At dawn the fog lifted from the city, but remained dark and dreary upon the deserted camp and the serried ranks of the foe, until the last boat left the Long Island shore.

"Intelligence of this movement reached the British commander-in-chief at half-past four in the morning. It was too late for successful pursuit, for when battalion after battalion was called to arms, and a troop of horsemen sped toward the East river, the last boat was beyond pistol shot, and as the fog rolled away and the sunlight burst upon the scene, the American flag was waving over the motley host of Continentals and militia marching toward the hills of Rutgers' farm."

We lads and the "admiral" did good work on that night; but Lieutenant Winterbottom did not come to us with orders, nor had we the honor of ferrying over the leaders of our army. Many weeks afterward we learned that the lieutenant had carried his last command in this world — he had done all that the bravest might in defense of the Cause, for he had given to it his life, and we lads mourned as for a warm friend, for such he had been to us during the short time we knew him.

When morning came we remained aboard the

sloop in the East river just off Rutgers' farm, believing the moment had come when there was no longer any work for us, and wondering not a little as to what should be done with Seth Hartley, for it seemed as if it was not our right to hold him prisoner, even though he had been such only in name for many a day.

It was Seth himself who settled the matter while we were eating breakfast that morning, by saying:

"I'm not minded to turn deserter after once havin' sworn to serve the king, neither am I willin' to do what I may against the people of this colony, therefore it shall be as if you still held me to my parole. It would be more manly, perhaps, if I stood out boldly as one who had forsaken his colors after learning that the king was in the wrong; but I'm thinkin' it best to wait a while, an' maybe the chance will come when I can declare my intentions in proper fashion."

And from that moment we counted him as one of us, never allowing the idea to creep into our minds that he would return to the lobster-backs, save as an enemy.

If I were to make any attempt at setting down all we said in the cuddy of the sloop when we lay at anchor after our work as ferrymen, while trying to figure out how it might be possible for us to do something in aid of the Cause, I might never come to an end of my story, for our tongues wagged fast and long in discussion, and we proposed many plans which would have been so impossible of execution that he who might read would set us down as a party of simples needing a lesson in sound commonsense.

The result of so many words was that we ar-

rived at no conclusion whatsoever, and when night came all hands turned in, for we were sadly in need of sleep, wondering with sore hearts as to what would be the fate of our parents on Long Island now that the Britishers had undisputed possession.

Although we were much the same as mustered out of service, it was not to be that we should enjoy a full night's sleep. It was to me as if I had been lost in slumber no more than half an hour when I was brought out of the bunk all standing by the roar of heavy guns, as, quite naturally, were my companions.

Without being exactly aware of how we came there, all hands of us found ourselves standing in the cockpit staring stupidly around until the night breeze had blown the slumber from our eyes, when it seemed very much as if the Britishers were determined to capture New York before our people had had time to recover from the fatigue of the hasty retreat.

The night was not so dark but that we could make out quite distinctly a forty-gun ship coming up past the batteries on Bowling Green, her port guns sending forth flashes of flame as she threw shot into the city, and all the while every cannon on our side that could be brought to bear on her, was being discharged as rapidly as the gunners could reload it.

The din was deafening, and for a time I believed we had before us a battle far more important than the one just fought on Long Island, for then we heard the roar of the cannon from a great distance, whereas here it was under our very noses, and more than once did a heavy shot fall so near the sloop that we were drenched by the spray which spouted

up in torrents as the missile plunged hissing in the water.

"The fleet is comin' up to lay the town in ashes!" Sam cried with a sob, and verily every man jack of us was of the same opinion, for what other explanation could be made?

The enormous ship came steadily on up the East river, apparently no more disturbed by our fire than one of us would have been by a swarm of mosquitoes, and as she approached, looking as though heading directly for us, I made a simple of myself by giving words to the thought which came suddenly into my mind:

"She is after us! That must be the same vessel from which we escaped, an' her captain is minded to show us what it costs to give a king's vessel the slip!"

Abel Grant burst into a hearty laugh, Seth Hartley joining him, and I was puzzled to make out what those two could see in the situation that should provoke mirth, until our "admiral" cried as soon as it was possible to speak:

"So you think they would send a whale to catch a herrin', eh, Ephraim Lyttle? Verily you must think that the Minute Boys of Long Island are of vast importance in the eyes of the king's officers!" and again the foolish fellow gave voice to his mirth.

"Then why is she headin' directly for the sloop?" I asked angrily. "If she holds her course much longer we shall find ourselves under her stem!"

"Have you forgotten that the channel is on this side?" Abraham asked, not laughingly, but as if he pitied me because of my ignorance. "Besides,

she's minded to do our batteries all the harm possible, an' therefore is pumpin' shot into 'em at short range."

I began dimly to realize that I had given my comrades due cause for mirth, and to cover the confusion which began to creep over me, I asked of Seth:

"Can you see any others of the fleet?"

"There are none in sight yet, as should be the case if they were sailin' in line of battle. I allow that this ship is alone; come to see how much of mischief may be done while the Americans are supposed to be in a bit of muddle over losin' the battle."

It did not seem to me possible that this could be the true explanation, for I failed to figure how it might advantage the Britishers to send a single ship where it really seemed that our people should be able to sink her, and as if he read my thoughts, Seth added:

"It don't stand to reason the field pieces ashore can do her much in the way of harm; but if she should get into serious trouble there are enough other ships to come to her rescue."

Even though there was so much of danger to us, and although I was growing timorous as she advanced, it would have been impossible not to have admired the magnificent spectacle of this enormous hulk sailing slowly up the river, her larboard ports all aflame as the guns were discharged, and the decks crowded with men who lined the rails as if to show how insignificant they considered our efforts to do them an injury.

"Surely if one vessel can come here unharmed, it is only a question of when the British admiral

is ready to do the work, an' then New York is in the possession of the king's forces," Sam said mournfully, speaking as if simply giving words to the thoughts in his mind, and Seth Hartley replied, but with no ring of triumph.

"Ay, lad, he who could think otherwise would be short-sighted indeed, an' I'm of the opinion that already is your General Washington askin' himself how he can best save his army."

"Then the Cause is lost?" I cried, and Seth said as he laid his hand on my shoulder:

"Ay, if we count New York as bein' the only place in rebellion against the king; but we in England have believed that the other colonies would put up a stiffer fight than might be looked for here."

"Then why have all the troops been sent here instead of elsewhere?" Abraham asked, ducking his head very suddenly as a shot from the ship came between him and the mainmast of the sloop.

"It don't stand to reason that an ignorant marine like me should be able to figure out the whys an' wherefores, an' yet we try now an' then. While comin' up from Halifax, knowin' we was bein' brought here to put an end to what Englishmen call a rebellion, it stands to reason that we tried to guess why we were bound for New York instead of some other port, an' this is much the way our sea lawyers worked the traverse: This town will make a good startin' point; a base of supplies is needed for the army as well as the navy, an' we came to believe that this was the place picked out. But, even though the town is the same as taken, nothin' has been done towards bringin' you to terms — the work is hardly yet begun."

"Surely we may be far in the dumps when a

Britisher thinks it's his duty to give us a little cheer," Abel Grant said with a laugh. "There's no doubt but that Seth is in the right, an' even though the Minute Boys of Long Island may not be able to do anythin' on their own ground, there's plenty of room elsewhere in the colonies for them as believe in the Cause."

While we had thus been talking the big ship passed us, giving no heed to the little Swiftsure, but sailing straight on up the river, and we ceased to think of ourselves as we asked where she was bound. We could trace her course by the flashes of fire while she was near our line of defenses, and then all was still; whether the enemy had come to anchor, or was yet moving, no one could say.

"I reckon we can turn in now," Abel Grant said with a yawn as he entered the cuddy after we had waited, listening, ten minutes or more without hearing anything further from the enemy. "I don't lay claim to havin' a head bigger'n them around me, but I'll wager a couple of clams that the ship counts on comin' to anchor nearby so's to help pen our army up in the town till the fleet gets ready to scoop the whole boilin'. It won't work, though, for General Washington ain't the kind of a man to be found with both eyes shut at the same time."

Then we turned in, to sleep as only tired people can until the rays of the rising sun heated the cuddy so hot that we were forced to go outside lest we be baked like a cake.

As a matter of course, the first thing we looked for was the ship that had kicked up such a row in the night, and nearly frightened me into showing myself a coward; but she was nowhere in sight. Abel Grant hailed a fellow who was coming down

the river in a skiff, and learned from him that the Britisher had anchored in Turtle bay, where everything had been made snug as if she counted on ending her days there.

Before we were done speculating as to the meaning of such a settling down, we heard that the whole British fleet had moved up off Governor's Island, within cannon-shot of the town, and this seemed to be an end of the movement.

"They're waitin' till everythin' is good an' ready, after which we'll see 'em come inter town lookin' for stray rebels," Abel Grant said with a grin, as if believing himself very witty. "'Cordin' to the way I figger things out, matters will hang as they are for quite a spell, an' now's the time when I can 'tend to a little business of my own."

"What do you mean?" Sam asked, when Abel ceased speaking as if his story was told.

"Jest what I say. It strikes me that we ought'er know what's happenin' over on the island, an' I'm goin' to run across there this mornin'."

"It's a good idea!" I cried excitedly, for, if the truth must be confessed, I had almost forgotten that the folks at home would be anxious regarding us, and Sam began loosening the mainsail, when Abel cried sharply:

"Now what'er you about?"

"Gettin' under way. The wind will die out before noon, an' it stands us in hand to take advantage of this early breeze."

"Did you think I was crazy enough to allow we could go there in the sloop?"

"How else can you go?" I asked in surprise.

"With the Britishers in possession of the island, don't it strike you that the Tories will be mighty

perky? How long after we came to anchor in Wallabout before every bloomin' one of that scurvy gang would be puttin' out to scoop us in as prisoners?"

I wasn't so thick-headed but it was possible to understand that of all dangerous places for us, our island was the worst, and I sat down in the stern-sheets feeling mighty desolate, for it seemed just then as if I had indeed lost my home.

"There's no good reason why I shouldn't be able to sneak ashore an' find out what's been done," Abel said as he gathered up half a dozen ship's biscuit. "I'll put across in the punt, an' be back sometime in the night, if nothin' happens."

He evidently believed we would try to prevent him from making the venture, or, perhaps, insist on going with him, for even while speaking he went over the rail into the small boat, and was a dozen yards or more away before I gathered my wits sufficiently to cry out:

"Come back! I want to go with you!"

Abel shook his head, and Sam said in a decided tone:

"You can't do anythin' of the kind, Ephraim Lyttle. The venture is risky enough for one, without makin' it worse by doublin' the chances. I don't believe he can go ashore without bein' picked up by some Tory who is burnin' to do harm to a Whig without much danger to himself; but how could we have stopped him?"

"Mother will think I am heedless of her, not to have come with him," I persisted, and Abraham replied:

"There isn't one chance in a thousand that he'll see any of our people. Don't you suppose they

had sense enough to leave when it was known that the American army had retreated?"

"But where could they go?"

"You know very well that I can't answer the question; but it seems certain to me they would have gone, an' if he comes back with word of havin' seen them, you an' I'll make the venture as soon as may be."

What could I say after that promise, save at the expense of proving myself even a greater simple than I was willing to admit? We had rebelled against the king, and must take whatever it was in his power to deal out to us. That we ourselves were not prisoners was fortunate, and crying over what couldn't be cured wouldn't mend matters.

We laid at anchor all day, making no attempt to go ashore, and hearing nothing in the way of news that was particularly cheerful. Now and then one man or another would pass nearby, either on shore or by water, and we soon came to understand that it was generally believed General Howe could come into New York whenever he felt so disposed.

Our troops were yet in town, apparently bent on holding it; but if the ships of the British fleet once opened fire upon them, they could do little or nothing save die at their posts.

During the afternoon Jethro Dyker pulled up the river in search of a skiff that had been lost the night before, and came aboard for a chat, telling us much that we already knew, and very little in the way of real news.

"Father is makin' ready to get out of town when the army leaves," he announced. "He says General Washington couldn't hold New York if he had twice as many men, an' once the Britishers are

here we Whigs will have a hot time of it. What are you lads countin' on doin'?"

That was exactly what we couldn't tell him, and, receiving no answer, he mapped out our plans as if believing we had been waiting for him to say what we ought to do:

"You'll take mighty good care to leave when the troops first begin to move, that is, if there's wind enough to fill your sails, an' if there ain't, you'll abandon the sloop, of course."

"We'll take a good many chances before doin' that," Abraham said curtly, irritated because Jethro had taken it upon himself to tell us what we should do. "We'll hold on to the sloop quite a spell waitin' for a wind, rather than give her up without a struggle."

"Then you'll show yourselves to be a crew of fools!" Jethro cried as he went over the rail into his skiff. "What good will she do you while you're in prison, for that's where all hands will be as soon as the Tories can give information about you?"

"We'll take some chances before showin' the white feather," Sam cried, and Jethro rowed away in silence, as if leaving us to our fate in punishment for being pig-headed.

We did not feel any more comfortable in mind after young Dyker had gone, although never one of us would have allowed the others to fancy he was at all disturbed, and, speaking now only for myself, it was with a decided sense of relief that I saw the shadows of night begin to lengthen.

In the distance we could see four vessels of the enemy's fleet, lying with guns trained on the town, and we knew that, hidden from view by the island,

the remainder of the vessels were ready to work death and destruction at the bidding of that red-coated officer who represented the king in North America.

"I don't reckon we shall be any the worse off if we make the most of what stores are aboard," Sam said with an evident effort to speak in a jovial tone. "I'm goin' to cook the very best supper possible, an' we'll have it ready when Abel Grant gets here, for I fancy he'll be sharkish after his long pull an' longer tramp."

It was a decided relief to have something with which to occupy one's time, and all hands turned to with a will to help the cook, prolonging the work as much as possible in order that the supper might not be ready before Abel arrived.

Under more pleasant circumstances we would have considered the meal a veritable feast, so plentiful and varied was it; but who can wonder that we felt as if we no longer had homes, and were remaining near our birthplace only by sufferance of those whom we knew to be deadly enemies? Even Seth Hartley appeared ill at ease, and thinking that possibly he might be regretting having cast in his lot with ours when everything was so dark and threatening, I taxed him with having such thoughts, whereupon he said, speaking so heartily that I could not have doubted him even had I been so disposed:

"I am givin' no heed to myself, lad. It was not with the belief you would win a speedy victory that I much the same as turned deserter, for I knew beyond a reasonable doubt there must be many dark days. It is because you lads, whom I have come to consider as very good friends, are in such dis-

tress of mind while I am unable to say or do anythin' that may give relief. My father an' mother are both dead, but I can come somewhere near guessin' how I'd feel if knowin', as you do, that they'd been turned out of house an' home."

I shook his hand heartily; it was all I could do, for had I trusted myself to speak at that moment the tears must have come first, and what kind of a figure would the commander of Minute Boys cut if he blubbered like any baby?

Well, we made ready the feast, and although it was nearly nine o'clock in the evening before Sam was willing to admit that his work was done, Abel still remained absent.

"He has found friends with whom he lingered," Seth Hartley said, striving to speak cheerily. "Like enough he has never fancied that you might be anxious if he remained away so late."

We waited another hour without hearing anything from our "admiral," and then at Abraham's suggestion we went through the motions of eating; but if the other fellows came as near being choked by the food as did I, the feast was anything rather than a success.

We nibbled at this or that until time enough had been spent to make it appear as if we were having a happy evening of it, and then all hands set about clearing up the cuddy, after which I suggested that we turn in, leaving one on deck to stand watch, though why there was need for such precaution I could not have explained.

"Who shall stand the first watch?" Sam asked.

"I'll take the first trick," was my reply, whereupon both Sam and Abe declared that they had no desire for sleep just then.

Therefore it was that all hands remained in the cockpit, straining their ears for the first sound of a paddle from the direction of the opposite shore, but hearing nothing throughout all the long hours of darkness.

When day dawned we searched with our eyes for the punt. There were two or three small craft moving about, but none resembling the one we were so eager to see, and until the sun rose we remained silent and motionless gazing over the water, when Abraham said abruptly:

"It would be foolish for us to shut our eyes to what we know must be the facts. Abel Grant would never have risked putting off from Wallabout bay in the daylight, an' because of his not comin' we know he has been made a prisoner."

No one replied to this. All of us had the same thought, but had not dared to put it in words.

"I'm goin' to hunt for him," Abraham said slowly and deliberately, after a long time of silence. "No, no, not till night," he added, seeing that Sam was about to make some objections. "I'm not quite such a fool as to put off before dark; but when the sun sets I shall start, forcin' Jethro Dyker to lend me a skiff. Abel is our comrade, an' we cannot stay here idle knowin' he is in trouble."

"I shall go with you!" I cried, and Sam echoed my words, whereupon, much to my surprise, Seth Hartley asked:

"Why not all go? You would be foolish to make a try at followin' on his trail, for those who picked him up would serve you in the same way; but, now that the fleet is close up here, why wouldn't it be possible, with a good wind, to sail past them

in the night, an' begin your search from some other part of the island?"

It was a right bold plan, one smacking of great peril; but in the mood we then were danger was welcome, although we did not admit as much to each other as we stood staring across the waters in silence.

CHAPTER XIII.

NEWS OF ABEL.

WHEN Seth Hartley proposed that we set off in search of Abel Grant in the sloop, holding together as a company rather than sending out one or two in search of the missing man, the idea struck us very favorably, because at the moment, so great was our sorrow and so grave our forebodings, the very peril of the enterprise recommended it.

As we sat there silent and thoughtful, however, each member of the little party seemingly desirous of viewing the matter in every possible light, it was much as if the entire scheme had changed in color.

It was easy enough while we lay at anchor within an hundred feet of the shore, to say that we would sail down past the British fleet in the night; but to do it was quite another matter, and this we understood more clearly the longer we speculated upon it.

Seth Hartley had spoken as if believing we could make the venture more readily because the enemy's vessels had come up near to Governor's Island; but as I pondered over the matter it seemed to me that the danger was increased thereby. We would most likely find the war vessels in a cluster close by the town, and if peradventure we were able to pass them, then would lie in our path all the

transports and store-ships, any one of which must have on board two or three guns at the very least, the smallest of which would be sufficient to sink us offhand.

It did not seem to me possible we could make the passage, because the enemy would be on the alert, and our sloop was not so small but that she would attract sufficient attention to result in her being overhauled. It was not probable the Britishers would allow any craft to sail through their fleet without knowing exactly where she was bound and what her purpose, therefore would we be stopped, so I figured, even if they failed of recognizing us as the sloop which had escaped from the frigate, and this last seemed more than possible.

Luther Stedman and his friend had given information concerning us when their desire for revenge was slighter than after we had taken one of them a prisoner for the second time. Luther had then spent considerable time and labor to bring us to grief, and how much more earnestly would he have worked to accomplish it again. As I figured it, he had taken especial pains to spread information concerning us throughout all the fleet, and the proof that he would strain every effort was shown in his attack upon us while we lay off the ferry stairs.

Then again, suppose we should succeed in what seemed well nigh like the impossible, and get into the lower bay, what could that effect?

Abel Grant had landed near our homes on the Wallabout, and if captured, as appeared to be the fact, it must have been in that vicinity, therefore to get any trace of him we would be forced to go entirely across the island, taking all the chances of

running upon the Tories, who by this time must be swarming there like angry bees.

The longer I thought of Seth Hartley's plan the more impossible of execution did it appear to be, and I looked around upon my comrades to learn if their courage remained unshaken.

I fancied it was possible to see an expression of growing distrust on Abraham's face while he was apparently studying the situation, and I asked with a laugh which had in it more of nervousness than mirth:

"Well, Abe, what say you to runnin' the gauntlet of the fleet in the Swiftsure, an' afterward, if so be the little craft remains afloat, go up across the island, which by this time must be literally crowded with Tories and red-coats?"

"It may not easily be done," he said thoughtfully. "To look forward it seems impossible, an' yet I would not dwell upon the chances we must take, but rather as to which would be the more honest, so far as duty to our comrade is concerned. Whether we are to lay here in safety, leavin' him to his fate, or, takin' our lives in our hands, do what little we may toward aidin' him? I am not eager to give up my life, an' this is not a matter in which the Cause can be benefited by our death. Yet does it seem to me that we must make an effort, if so be no other plan presents itself, rather than reproach ourselves durin' all the remainder of our days, which havin' been too cowardly to raise a hand in behalf of one who would have given up everythin' to help us."

Abel spoke so seriously that it was as if he had been reading a sermon, and I was awed by his tone as well as by the words.

It seemed to me as if he had left us no opportunity for discussion; but so set it down that it had become our solemn duty, regardless of all danger, and once more I fell silent.

It appeared very much as if Sam and Seth Hartley had been impressed in the same way as had I, for we remained there idle, each busied with his own thoughts, until the noon was near at hand. Then, as if having forgotten some duty, Sam leaped suddenly to his feet, hauling in on the cable as if time was precious, and Abe asked curiously what he was about.

"I'm pullin' the sloop so far in that I can wade ashore, for a wettin' is necessary in order to land."

"Where are you goin'?"

"To get a skiff, since that must be done before we can set off. You are not minded that we shall sail into the lower bay without means of landin' save by runnin' the sloop ashore?"

This was sufficient proof that Sam believed there was no other course left us to pursue save that of carrying out Seth Hartley's plan, and because I was growing so nervous that action of any kind was preferable to idleness, I lent a hand until the bow of the sloop grated on the sand, when Sam started for the shore. He gained it at no other expense than a partial wetting, which on a day so warm was not to be reckoned as a disaster, and then, at a rapid pace, set off in the direction of Master Dyker's dock.

Now that it seemed as if we were fully committed to the venture our tongues were loosened, and while he was absent we speculated upon that which was to be done as if it was no more than an ordinary incident, instead of a hazard upon

which our lives were staked, with the odds in favor of their being lost.

It was not possible to map out any real plan of action, for we must go it blindly, trusting to the chapter of accidents, and hoping fortune would favor; but we all decided upon standing straight across to the Jersey shore, hugging close under the guns of our batteries until coming to the North river, and then keeping so far as might be under the lee of the land, if the wind permitted, until it became necessary to strike across from Staten Island.

Sam came back with the skiff after having remained absent mayhap an hour, and as he rowed toward us Abraham asked cheerily, with never a tremor of the voice to tell of the desperate venture he had in mind:

"Was Master Dyker willin' to lend a skiff, knowin' that the chances were against her bein' returned?"

"Ay, that he was not," Sam said with a laugh. "I argued with him and his son in vain, an' then dared them to raise a hand toward stoppin' me when I took that boat which seemed most nearly fitted to our purpose."

"Did they make any attempt to stop you?"

"I didn't give 'em a chance, for two to one were greater odds than I cared to have against me, therefore, takin' advantage of the opportunity when Master Dyker turned his back in anger, I pulled away."

"But that is neither more nor less than stealin', Sam Garratt!" I cried.

"Ay, figure it that way if you will; but it was stealin' to prevent a friend from bein' murdered, for

such is the danger in which Abel Grant stands if so be the Tories have him in their power."

This was an argument which could not be answered, and I remained silent while Sam came alongside, made the skiff fast, and went into the cuddy. He came out a moment later with the musket in his hands, and Abe asked laughingly:

"Are you thinkin' the Britishers may make an attack?"

"I am of the mind that Master Dyker will come for his skiff, an' it is not my intention to let him have her. He has ever claimed to be a good Whig, but now that the enemy is so near at hand an' evidently about to take possession of the town, it looks much as if there was a Tory love creepin' into his heart. If I am wrong, he should cheerfully give his skiff to the Cause; if my suspicions are correct, I will hold her because we cannot carry out the plan proposed by Seth without a small boat."

I know not why, but Sam's resolute bearing heartened me wondrously; the idea of his taking forcible possession of Master Dyker's property in order that we might set about the work of rescue, and allowing to hold her at the muzzle of a musket, sent a fellow's blood tingling through his veins, and I almost forgot what awaited us once we set off.

Master Dyker did not come, however, perhaps because he was ashamed of himself for having refused to lend a well-nigh worthless skiff for such a purpose, and again, perhaps, because he suspected what might be the result if he tried to take her from us.

How the remainder of that day passed I cannot well say; but the hours dragged as if they would never come to an end, and there were times when

I could have sworn the sun stood still in the heavens. We were not inclined for conversation; there was nothing with which to occupy our hands, save we were minded to cook dinner, and under the circumstances our stomachs revolted at the thought of food.

We moped in the cockpit and in the cuddy like a lot of sick chickens, and when finally the night shut in, bringing a gusty wind with scurrying clouds which told of thunder showers, we were more relieved in mind than I can well describe.

"It seems that we are to have it our way at the start," Seth Hartley said as he stood well forward peering into the gathering gloom in the direction of Governor's Island. "If the makin's of this night had been left to ourselves, we could not have cut out a better one for the purpose. I'm thinkin' that a cruise down through the fleet will be quick an' easy with all the wind the sloop can stand up under."

It would have been a relief to all of us if we could have set off at that moment, for the suspense of waiting was far more trying than the danger of the venture; but yet we know without speculating upon it, that it would not be well to come upon the fleet in the early evening, unless peradventure there were signs that the threatening clouds might be dispersed, and Seth Hartley voiced the opinion of all when he said in the tone of one who asks a question:

"I'm thinkin' it will be wiser for us to make a start nearabout midnight, if so be there is no change in the weather, an' with this wind the run from here to whatsoever part of the island you count on landin', will be a short one."

"I see no reason why we should not strike the shore at the first point where it may be done," Abe said thoughtfully. "If we could get into Gowanus cove we might sail up the creek a long distance, an' thus save us much foot travel."

"Ay, an' the chances are that the king's ships will be nearabout us," Sam suggested, and Seth Hartley replied grimly:

"No more in one place than another, an' if you who know the island believe it were better for us to make up the creek, then accordin' to my mind there is no more danger in that venture than any other. Therefore let us decide before startin' that we will put in at the place you have named."

The evening passed yet more slowly than had the day; but we gathered a little hope each moment because the threatening clouds, instead of dispersing, were gathering more thickly, and the wind came now and then in such volume as told that before daybreak the craft which ventured out of the harbor would do so under close-reefed canvas.

Even though we had known our venture was certain to end in death, I believe of a verity we would still have felt a certain sense of relief when the moment came for putting the plan into execution, because it was as if each moment we remained there at anchor the suspense became greater.

It was not necessary any one give the word for the beginning of the voyage. When, as nearly as we could judge, it lacked no more than an hour of midnight, Seth Hartley rose to his feet, for we had all been sitting in the cockpit, and as he did so we followed his example, each one doing that which was necessary for getting the sloop under way without a word having been spoken.

It was not a night on which any one would venture out save of necessity. There was a reasonably heavy sea in the inner harbor, giving token of what would be found in more open water, and the fitful wind tore at the canvas when we loosened it, as if with giant hands. Under ordinary conditions two of us could readily have made sail; but on this night all hands were needed before we had the mainsail hoisted with a single reef.

I went to the helm because no one else offered to do so, and the Swiftsure darted on like a mad thing when we were come where the full weight of the wind could be had, sending the spray masthead-high, and snoring into it like a line-of-battleship.

No person hailed us from the shore even when we were passing the batteries where I had fancied we might be called upon to give an account of ourselves, and as we stretched across for the Jersey shore, opening up the water to the westward of Governor's Island, it was as if all that portion of the bay was studded thickly with points of light, telling of the British fleet. One would have said that it would be impossible to thread our way among them in the darkness, without coming afoul of one craft or another.

If nothing had depended upon my seamanship, that is to say, had we been out simply for our own pleasure, or on ordinary business, with little of importance depending upon the outcome, I should not have distrusted my ability to handle the sloop, although the weather was what could truly have been called nasty. But with the lives of all our party depending upon the skill and ready wit which might be shown, I trembled for myself, fearing through

some blunder my comrades would come to grief.

"There's one thing about it," Abe said as he clawed his way aft while the Swiftsure danced like a cork upon the heavy swell, "we cannot well heave to, no matter how many of the king's officers so command, an' it will be a case of the English sailors showin' what they can do with oars, if the lobster-backs count on boardin' us."

"It would be well if all hands stood on the look-out, for with so much spray comin' aboard I'm not havin' the best chance to see what course to steer," I said, not minded to discuss the possibilities just then.

"Sam and Seth Hartley are in the bow, an' I came aft to trim ship, for she was too much by the head with all three forward. There's one thing certain, we can't make Gowanus cove without tackin', an' that's likely to be a nice job with so many vessels in the way."

"It's more likely we'll be overhauled before gettin' that far," I replied, hoping to still his tongue by reminding him of the peril, for conversing when a fellow feels irritable and nervous is not pleasing.

The sloop dashed on as if eager to come upon the enemy. It seemed to me that we had never seen her show one-half the speed she did on this night when we were bearing down upon the king's fleet, and while I would not have checked the pace, yet were we moving too swiftly for comfort, although one having more courage than I, might say that the quicker the danger was encountered the better, since it saved a disagreeable time of suspense.

I believed less than half an hour had elapsed from the time we weighed anchor, before we were running under the quarter of the frigate which lay

nearest the Jersey shore, and those on board may have hailed us a dozen times without our being aware of the fact, so great was the noise made by the wind and the water; but when we were come directly astern, within half a musket-shot, I should say, some one cried out from the quarter-deck.

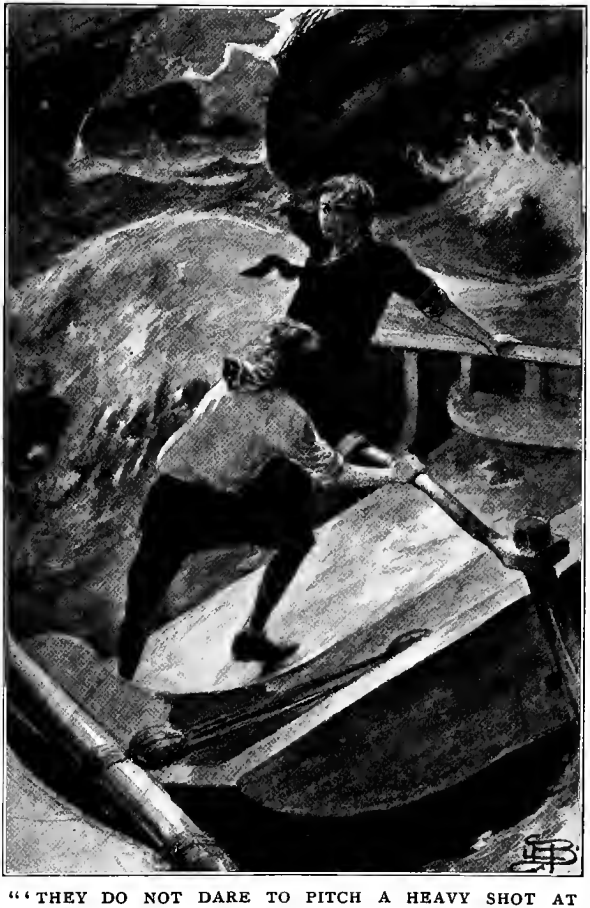
"They must be lubbers not to understand that we can't come about here," Abe said angrily, and I replied with a laugh, for courage was returning as the danger grew thicker:

"It makes no difference what they think, we're bound to keep movin' now, or throw the mast out of her. If those lobster-backs count on stoppin' her, it's time they got their firearms ready, else we shall be out of range."

It was as if we had no more than passed this ship when we were close aboard of another, and this time when the wind brought the faintest echo of some sentinel's voice, a tiny flash of flame followed, telling that whosoever was on duty had discharged his musket. But no report was heard for the wind would have swallowed up even the roar of a cannon, and as for the missile, it went out to sea, very like.

I had no time to think of what the Britishers might do. It required all my skill and strength to avoid the numerous craft in the way, and even when from one ship, after we had passed to windward of her, there came a crackling of musketry which told that the fellow had fired point blank at us, I had no time to give heed to it. It was enough that we were not harmed.

The wind was increasing momentarily, and growing more spiteful all the while. The sloop pitched and plunged as if she had been in the open sea,



"'THEY DO NOT DARE TO PITCH A HEAVY SHOT AT US!'"

staggering under the weight of canvas that was more than I would have believed she could have carried, had I given heed to the matter.

Common prudence should have dictated our reefing close down; but we had no time to think of it.

It was a case of carrying all and taking the chances, and this we did in good and plenty during the hour when we threaded our way in and out among the ships, sometimes hearing the reports of the weapons as the guard fired in token for us to heave to; again seeing only the flashing of the muskets, until I came to understand that the many ships at anchor which had seemed to me would prove so dangerous, was in reality our safety, for they were anchored so near together that had a heavy gun been fired at us the chances were more in favor of damage being done to one of the consorts.

"They do not dare to pitch a heavy shot at us!" Abe said gleefully as he clung to the rail lest he be washed overboard, for the volume of water which came across our decks threatened each instant to swamp the little sloop.

It was as if that fever which is said to come upon one during the excitement of battle had taken possession of me, for I lost all consciousness of self, and seemed to be only a portion of the gallant little craft which was struggling so desperately and valiantly to bear us safely past our enemies. I felt her leap beneath me as I clutched with all my strength at the tiller to hold her on the proper course, and there were times when I may have cried aloud in triumph because of the brave effort which she was making.

That sloop which we had built from keel to mast-

head was to me on this night a living thing, and I would have sworn she was conscious of what depended upon her.

I wish it were possible for me to set down a description of that mad sail in such words that he who reads would be able to see it as I felt it. I believe of a verity that we were fired upon by the sentries of every second vessel in all that fleet, and yet never once did I hear a missile strike us. We stood up and across twice before making the mouth of the cove, therefore passed some of the ships three times, so that their guards had ample opportunity to make ready for us; but the little Swiftsure danced about so lively that, in the darkness, they might as well have tried to hit one of the stars.

Just as we entered the mouth of the cove the thunder clouds broke, and the water seemingly came down in solid sheets, while the wind roared as if a hurricane was raging. It was the wildest storm I ever saw, and the small boat that was exposed to its fury must have foundered in a twinkling.

While we were tacking to make the cove Abraham said to me, forced to scream in my ear otherwise I could not have heard the words:

"When we get into the cove it will be a question of takin' to our heels, leavin' the sloop to her fate, for the Britishers will put after us, knowin' we are in a trap."

I felt firmly convinced that such would be the case, and said to myself that to abandon the Swiftsure after she had borne us so bravely, was much like turning one's back on a comrade; but when the storm burst I knew beyond a peradventure that the British would do no boat-chasing until we had had time to look after our craft.

As we glided into the comparatively still water of the cove Sam came aft jubilantly happy, saying as he danced in the cockpit regardless of the torrents of water which were like to have drowned him:

"It was mighty lucky for us that the ships were anchored so near together! Seth said they wouldn't dare to fire anythin' larger than a musket-ball; but there were times when I held my breath, expectin' to see the flash of a big gun."

"They haven't got a gunner aboard the fleet who could have hit this sloop while she was stormin' along at such a rate!" Abraham cried triumphantly. "Here I've spent nearly the whole day dreadin' the venture of runnin' through the fleet, an' yet it has been done, because we own the best boat in the colony, as easy as rollin' off a log!"

"It isn't well to crow very much just yet," I replied, feeling not a little irritated to hear him speak as if all the danger was passed. "We are here in the cove where the Britishers can take us when they get good an' ready."

"But we're not countin' on stayin' many minutes."

"Ay, but then they can work their will on the sloop, an' after what she has done this night, I feel toward her as one does toward a comrade who has stood at his back in a hot fight. Then, when we have left her to the lobster-backs, we must face both Tories an' Britishers, who are coverin' the land as did the locusts at the time of the plague."

"Starboard! Starboard unless you're minded to plump into a mud-bank!" Seth Hartley cried from his station in the bow, and I put a stopper on my tongue lest at the very moment when it seemed

that we had escaped, I come to grief by running ashore.

Well, in order to shorten what promises to be an overly long story, I will content myself by saying only that we ran the full length of the creek, when we were come to a thicket on both banks, amid the foliage of which the gallant little sloop would be partially screened from view, and then we made ready for the tramp, counting that we could not afford to wait until the storm cleared away, for while it was raging we might advance with some assurance of being undisturbed.

We lingered only long enough to furl the wet canvas and stop it so far that the wind could not blow it about. Then we stuffed into our pockets and the bosoms of our shirts as much of provisions as could be carried without inconvenience, and Abraham burdened himself with the musket and ammunition, although I argued that we would be better off without any weapon, rather than only one among four.

"I'll take my chances with one, instead of goin' empty-handed because all can't be equipped," he said grimly. "I don't count on bein' made prisoner by either Britisher or Tory if a stout fight will prevent."

"Better a live dog than a dead lion," Seth Hartley said with a grimace. "If we come upon enemies, an' you see I'm countin' the English as much my foes as yours, it will be in considerable body, an' it's better to submit, in the hope of escapin' later, than lose a life."

In this I fully agreed with Seth, but it could be plainly seen that Sam and Abe feared impris-

onment on board a British ship more than they did death.

There was no indication that the storm was about to abate, when we stepped from the rail of the sloop to the shore. The rain was coming down literally in sheets, and even though we had not been drenched before making the cove, our garments would have been saturated within three minutes after we came out of the cuddy.

It had already been decided that if we succeeded in passing through the fleet our efforts should be bent on gaining the shore of Wallabout, for only in that vicinity could we hope to get any tidings of Abel Grant.

As a matter of course I was familiar with the country hereabout, but Abe claimed sufficient knowledge to make his way through the swamp, for, as every one knows, the land bordering the creek is marshy, therefore he took the lead, we following in single file, never raising our voices above a whisper after leaving the sloop.

Again did it seem as if our fears during the day just passed were all in the way of alarm that was like to come during the venture, for we plodded straight along through the rain without hearing or seeing any sign of an enemy, and a good hour before daybreak were come to the shanty in which lived Peter Snyder, an old man who had ever been friendly to the Cause and us Whigs.

He had no family; two cats were his only companions, and some of the island gossipers declared he was a witch, giving as proof the fact that he seldom went out fishing without taking the animals with him.

So far as could be told in the darkness and the storm, Peter had remained undisturbed while the Britishers were over-running the land, and Sam said to me as we crept cautiously up to the hut:

"It seems that we were born in the woods to be scared by an owl. The idea that we have spent twenty hours or more shakin' in our boots because of the dangers to be encountered, an' have come thus far as safely as if there was never a Britisher or Tory in the world, is something of which to be ashamed."

"Don't begin to crow too soon," I cautioned again, and then Abe, with his mouth close to the crack of the door, called Peter by name.

The old man could not have been a heavy sleeper, for in considerably less than five minutes he had admitted us and learned why we were come at such an hour.

"You had best go back, if so be you can," Peter said in a sorrowful tone. "This island is no place for Whigs, though I'm not thinkin' of runnin' away 'cause I'm not of enough account to tempt an attack."

"But we have come to find some trace of Abel Grant, an' don't count on turnin' tail till the work has been done," I said stoutly, for I felt very brave just then.

"Then there is nothin' here to keep you, for it's too late to help Abel," the old man said mournfully, as he began using flint and steel in order to throw a spark on the tinder, that he might light the wick which floated in a gourd of oil.

"Too late! Is he dead?" Sam cried sharply, and Peter, still striving to catch a spark, replied:

"It's worse than that, lad, as I look at it. I

was within sight of Abel when Luther Stedman pointed him out to a squad of red-coats, an' they made short work of it. Abel was talkin' with that cousin of his who married the Tory Simson, never dreamin' of danger any more than did I, when who should show up but Luther with a backin' of Britishers."

"What did they do with him?" I asked breathlessly.

"Marched the poor fellow off after shacklin' his hands behind him, an' if ever a man got a dressin' down, it was Luther when Abel's cousin broke loose on him for what he'd done."

"But that didn't mend matters!" Abraham cried impatiently. "Tell us what became of Abel!"

"He was marched off, as I've said, an' this mornin' his cousin told me that Luther was 'round braggin' 'bout his havin' been put aboard a ship that's lyin' in Gravesend bay. She ain't what they call a vessel of war," the old man continued as he succeeded in lighting the wick, thereby bringing to life a flame so feeble that it did little more than show how dark it was. "Some of the folks say she's been moored there to serve as prison ship for the Whigs that were taken durin' the battle, an' I've heard there are crowds of our people held by the king's troops."

Surely it seemed to me that we had risked our lives uselessly, for if Abel was really imprisoned on one of the British ships, the only hope of his release lay in General Washington's being able to whip the enemy offhand, and that, from what I had seen in New York, could not be dreamed of even by the staunchest Whig that ever drew breath.

"Where is Gravesend bay?" Seth Hartley asked

after we four had stood staring at each other a full minute while old Pete set about building a fire as if to cook breakfast for us.

But few words were needed to give the information desired, and then Sam said impatiently:

"No good can come of our standin' here idle. Shall we try to hunt out our friends on Wallabout?"

"There's little use of lookin' there for Whigs, lad," old Peter said sorrowfully. "I'm the only one left on the island, so far as I can make out; all save the Tories took to their heels when it was known that General Washington counted on beatin' a retreat."

"Do you know where my people went?" I asked eagerly.

"No; but it stands to reason they're on the New York side somewhere. Tell me, can our army hold the town?"

Before I could answer the question Seth Hartley said sharply, as if something had suddenly angered him:

"This is no place for you, lads. If you count on goin' to Gravesend, you should make the best speed now while it rains so hard that your enemies will likely keep under cover."

"Count on goin' to Gravesend?" I repeated. "What could we do there?"

"Make a try at freein' Abel Grant! Surely you don't reckon on holdin' back now when you know how sorely he's needin' you!"

CHAPTER XIV.

THE PRISON SHIP.

EVEN at the time when my mind was in such a whirl, I realized what a reproach it was to us so-called Minute Boys that it should have been our prisoner — a Britisher, who reminded us of duty, for until Seth Hartley spoke neither of us three had even dreamed of making so daring, and as it then seemed, useless a venture.

If Seth had dealt us a series of blows we could not have been more astonished than we were during sixty seconds after he spoke, and then Abraham said quickly, as if like myself he was ashamed because of not having been the first to realize what was our duty:

"Of course we'll make a try at freein' Abel Grant, even though there don't seem to be any chance we can succeed. If he has been taken on board one of the ships, I fail to see how we may lend him any aid, therefore, Seth Hartley, if you can cook up a plan, let us know what it is!"

"That's a good bit beyond me," the Britisher replied with a smile. "The only idea in my mind was that, havin' come out to lend Abel a hand, an' havin' got so far on the road, we're bound to make some kind of a try. What that may be can only be told when we're on the ground, where it will be

possible to see how he's fixed. This much is certain, however, that if we should pull him through it wouldn't be the only prisoner the English have lost since comin' to this port," and he looked at us wisely, whereat I cried, enthused by his words:

"You are right, Seth. No matter where he may be, his position can't be any more desperate than was ours when we were made fast to the frigate with you standin' guard over us! Then a way was opened, an' I'm beginnin' to have faith that somethin' of the same kind will turn up in this case."

Peter Snyder appeared to be absolutely frightened at hearing such a proposition. To him the fact that Abel Grant was shut up in a prison ship, was much the same as if the poor fellow had already died and was buried.

"You lads are worse than crazy to think of any such hair-brained venture as pitting yourselves against the Britishers!" he cried. "How will it be possible for you to get on board the ship unless you go as prisoners? Even if you could do that, how might there be a show to lend him a hand, guarded as we know he must be?"

"If we could answer your question, Peter, the work would already be mapped out," Abraham replied with a laugh. "It may be, an' so it really seems just now, that you're in the right; but the same can be said for Seth Hartley. There's a chance something will come up to give us an opportunity, for we are nearby the ship, and however small that chance may be, it's vastly better than to turn our backs on the poor fellow."

Peter was neither silenced nor convinced. To him it was as if we were going to certain death when we turned our faces toward Gravesend bay, and he

begged most piteously, as if his own life was at stake, that we would not venture our heads into the lion's jaws when there seemed to be no possibility we could withdraw them.

"That you should feel thus keenly for our danger shows you to be a true friend, Peter Snyder," Sam said when we were all wearied by the old man entreaties. "We would be bound to go even though it could be told in advance that no good would come of the attempt, an' the greatest favor you can do us now is to say nothin' more about it, lest the courage which Seth Hartley aroused ooze out at our fingers' ends."

"At least you will wait until the day breaks," Peter insisted, turning to the fireplace. "I shall have breakfast for you in a twinklin', an' he who goes forth on a full stomach is better prepared to meet whatsoever may come, than he who is hungry."

"We should be fillin' our stomachs at the expense of our necks," and Abraham tried to speak in a jovial tone. "Already has it cost us no little of courage to resist your entreaties, for a fellow doesn't hanker to breast such a storm as this; but while the darkness continues we may travel more safely than when day has come."

"In that you are right, lad," and Seth Hartley buckled his belt the tighter, as if making preparations for the journey. "You have not only Tory enemies; but British troops are here in plenty, an' it is in my mind that unless you may get to the bay before daylight, it will be a case of layin' in hidin' until another night shuts down."

The idea of spending the day in hiding, without a chance to dry our saturated garments, was in it-

self, if there had been no other, an incentive to begin the journey without further delay, and we literally pushed our way past Peter Snyder to the door, for the old man really attempted to detain us by force, so great was his fear that we were going to certain death.

"If you *should* live to be convinced that you can't hope to prevail against the enemy, an' are in need of a shelter, you'll come straight here," he said imploringly, as if asking the greatest of favors for himself.

"We'll come, Peter Snyder, whether in need of a shelter or not, if only to thank you for havin' so much of an interest in our welfare," I said, and truly I felt grateful to the old man because of the friendship which he displayed. "An' you'll hear from us again whether we succeed or fail, for desperate though the venture seems to you, I am of the mind that the Britishers won't get away with the whole of us — at least one will be spared to tell the story."

Then we went out into the night and the rain, finding the exercise of walking grateful rather than otherwise, for we had remained inactive so long that our wet garments clung to us, and, warm though the night was, we were chilled.

Now to any one who knows the trend of the land on Long Island from the head of Gowanus creek to Gravesend bay, the journey which lay before us will not appear to be any serious undertaking, for as the crow flies, I question if the distance be above six miles; but, as it appeared to me when we set out, we could count on being forced to cover at least ten miles because of the many detours in

order to avoid the enemy, and the climbing of the hills.

We held a sort of council when we first left Peter Snyder's hut, to decide whether we might venture directly to Gravesend village, and from there to the shore, or if we had best give a wide berth to all settlements regardless of the extra amount of trouble and labor involved.

We decided upon the latter plan, and with Abraham leading the way while I brought up the rear, set our faces toward the point of danger, as resolute as if we outnumbered the enemy two to one.

Unfortunately, or so it seemed to me, the rain ceased falling nearabout daybreak; the sun came out bright, and we could set it down as a certainty that every lobster-back on the island would be astir within the hour.

Up to this time, as nearly as I could guess, we had traveled on a zigzag course mayhap four miles, keeping to the thickets as much as possible, and never venturing even on a beaten path.

It was when the day had fully dawned that Seth Hartley called us to a halt, by stopping suddenly and looking about as if in search of something, whereat I asked curiously:

"What do you expect to find here?"

"A hidin' place."

"But surely we may keep on a couple of miles further," Sam cried. "The day is so young that there will be few astir within the next hour."

"An' there's no reason why we should take the chances of encounterin' those few," Seth said decidedly. "I want you lads to keep up your courage; but at the same time don't make the mistake

of belittlin' the difficulties. If we're so fortunate as to be able to lend Abel Grant a hand, it can only come about through our playin' the fox instead of the lion, an' the time spent on the journey is as nothin' compared with the possibility of lettin' the enemy know that we are on the island."

"Then you would have us lie under cover all day?" Abe asked irritably.

"Ay, for the next three days, if thereby we can keep the more secret our movements. Do you know of any place nearabout that will serve us?"

"On the other side of this hill is a sort of cave made by takin' out rock for a fort at Red Hook, an' I dare say we could find there somethin' in the way of a shelter, although in case the lobster-backs were on our trail, it wouldn't be difficult to smoke us out," and Abe pointed in the direction of the old quarry, as we lads called it, although hardly more than a year had elapsed since it was first opened.

"Then if so be you're willin', we'll take to cover without delay. Don't make the mistake of thinkin' that I'm tryin' to take command of this party," Seth Hartley added quickly, mistaking the expression on my face. "I'm ready to do whatsoever you shall think best; but at the same time am beggin' you, for your own safety, to follow my advice."

How could we do other than as he suggested?

There could be no question but that he was in the right, and surely if Abel Grant was already on board the prison ship it mattered little whether we arrived within one day or ten, for if there was to be a successful issue of our plans, it could only come about through our keeping secret every movement.

Abraham led us by the most direct course to what

had been called a quarry, although it was little more than an excavation, with huge fragments of rock lying everywhere about, amid which could be no difficulty in hiding ourselves, and, save by accident, there was little fear either Tory or Britisher would come that way.

We were not obliged to spend many moments in searching for what was desired. On going straight into the quarry we came upon the place where evidently the last blast had been made, and the rock shattered by the powder had not yet been removed. There we found a space no larger than the cuddy of the sloop, where we would be sheltered from view of any save those who might make an exhaustive search, and I question if there was a better hiding-place on the island, for such as we.

"This is snug enough," Sam said as we crawled in and began clearing away the smaller pieces of rock to admit of our sitting down with some degree of comfort; "but the trouble is that we've got fifteen long hours to spend here."

"Ay, fully that," Seth said cheerily, "for if you are correct as to the distance between us an' the bay, we ought not to set out again before midnight, therefore I'm countin' that we can spend the time profitably since the sleep we should have gotten last night is yet to be enjoyed."

I could well fancy that Sam's impatience at being forced to remain so long in one place was much the same as that which troubled me. While we were on the move, seemingly accomplishing something, it was not difficult to keep one's courage screwed to the sticking point; but I knew full well that when we had nothing with which to occupy ourselves save the passing of time, a realization of that which lay

in the near future would come upon us. In other words, I feared that inactivity would breed timorousness.

Well, it could not be helped, since there was no question but that we should keep under cover during the hours of daylight, and I followed Seth Hartley's example by making for myself as comfortable a bed as might be had amid the rocky fragments, and, this done, betook myself to courting sleep as a means of banishing unpleasant thoughts or dismal forebodings.

It seems strange to me now that I could have lost myself in the unconsciousness of slumber so quickly, knowing all the possibilities of the future; but it is a fact that I was hardly more than stretched out on the hard bed when I crossed over into Dreamland.

I must have remained thus happily unconscious many hours, for on awakening it could be seen by the absence of the sunlight which had penetrated our hiding place when we first entered, that the day was nearly spent.

I was for leaping to my feet at once, because long remaining in one position had cramped my limbs; but before I could do more than raise my head Sam's hand was pressed over my mouth, and I had sufficient sense to understand that there was reason why silence be maintained.

Of course my first thought was that the enemy must be near at hand, and pressing Sam's arm to let him know that his cautionary signal was understood, I slowly and noiselessly raised myself to a sitting posture, observing that all my comrades were awake and gazing intently out through the

apertures between the rocks that were loosely piled in front of us.

Then I could hear the hum of voices, and believing that the Tories might have found our trail on the wet earth, I crept cautiously to where it was possible for me to have a view of the entrance to the quarry.

There, much to my surprise, I saw four Britishers — marines I took them to be, because of the fact that they were clad in the same uniform as that worn by Seth Hartley when we made him prisoner. They were smoking, and had the appearance of men who had halted on a leisurely journey, rather than resting from the fatigues of a chase.

The first words which came to my ears were evidently a portion of an answer to some remarks:

"I don't like it, I tell you. I'm ready to do my full duty when it comes to what you might call real fightin'; but this huntin' down men an' boys simply because they do not happen to have the same opinions as we, ain't what I call manly."

Of a verity these were startling words to come from the mouth of one who had sailed across the sea to rivet yet more firmly the fetters which oppression had bound upon us; but my astonishment was not as great as it would have been had we not already made the acquaintance of Seth Hartley.

"What can you do when the orders are given?" a second voice asked, and the first speaker replied:

"Do! Why obey them, of course. That's what we're here for; but at the same time it may not set well on an honest man's stomach. I'm not thinkin' that perhaps the lout we carried down to the ship

wasn't deservin' of bein' stowed away; but it wasn't for any crime against the king that he went, mark you that! The snivellin' lump who claimed such a love for his majesty, was payin' off a personal score, else I'm much mistaken, an' this bein' made a cat's-paw of by them as claim to be so bloomin' loyal to the crown when they don't care a farthin's worth of silver spoons for it, ain't to my likin'."

My heart beat fast and violently. Could it be that these men were speaking of Abel Grant, and had been sent by our lucky stars to this very point that we might get the information of which we stood in need?

"In a rebellion like this, matey, it stands to reason there'll be a lot of private quarrels settled in just such a one-sided fashion as I reckon that young brute settled his last night. I've got no great love for these colonists who claim that the only desire they have got in life is to serve the king. What I claim is, that if a man has come over seas to settle down in a place like this, he should hang with his neighbors — their quarrels should be his, an' I'm looking upon this breed of cattle which the Americans call Tories, with precious little likin'; but it ain't for you nor me to say whether such an arrest as we have just had a hand in, is right or not. It's a case of obeyin' orders, matey, even though it goes agin the grain, an' I'm thinkin' we'll get a good many more of the same sort, especially after the town has been taken."

"Well, it's a beastly shame, put it as you will, that men wearin' the king's uniform should lend themselves to such work as has just been done. That young Tory who showed us where to find the

prisoner, did his best to get in a few blows, when he knew they couldn't be returned; but I whispered to the fellow we had in charge that if he'd give me his word not to run, I'd show him a chance to use his fists, if so be the informer got too rash, an' I'd have done it, too, with a right good will, for I hated the sneak the minute I heard he wanted to denounce one of his neighbors."

I was getting to have a better opinion of these soldiers which the king had sent against us, and a conversation such as we were overhearing then did much toward taking away the personal enmity I had always felt toward the lobster-backs. They were in the same position as Seth Hartley had been, sworn on enlisting to serve his majesty, and were but doing their duty when they fired upon us Americans. Yet all this might they do, and not relish the task.

I strained my ears to hear more of the conversation; but it had come to an end, for the man had relieved his mind concerning Luther Stedman, or some other of the same kidney, and was done with his grumbling for the time being. Not another word was spoken, so far as I could hear, and within a short time the sound of footsteps told that the visitors were departing.

"Who were they talking about?" I whispered eagerly to Abraham as soon as it seemed safe to speak, and he replied:

"I can't say for certain; but it strikes me that it might be Abel Grant an' Luther Stedman. Whether it was or no, however, that marine was a decent fellow, an' had a fair opinion of the Tories."

At this point Seth Hartley laid his hand on my

arm to command attention, as he said almost solemnly:

"That marine was a mate of mine. He was drafted, as was I, to the ship Good Hope, an' if so be she's bein' used as a prison hulk, I'm thinkin' our dream of lendin' aid to Abel Grant stands in a fair way of bein' realized. Barney Nelson, he who was grumblin', is a good deal of a man, and has the right idea about you colonists. If so be matters are as I think, an' we could come to have private speech with him, I'm believin' a full half of the work would be done."

I could hardly believe my ears. That we should have thus come upon, or, I might say, thus been visited by a comrade of Seth's seemed almost incredible, and that the very ship from which we had escaped was the one where we could count on finding Abel Grant, seemed too strange a coincidence to be true.

"Is it likely that she would be the one selected as a prison ship?" I asked hurriedly.

"As well her as another, lad. It seems to me that it must be, otherwise why is Barney engaged in escortin' prisoners to and fro?"

"An' you believe he would lend a hand in the freein' of Abel?"

"I'm not goin' so far as to say that, Ephraim Lyttle; but this you may count on, that if Barney, without breaking the oath he took, can serve us in any way, he'll do it. It's a big point in our favor, however he may look at the matter, if we have a friend among those who man the prison ship."

"But if he is on duty there, how did he happen to come here?" I asked like a simple, and Seth very properly shut my mouth by saying:

"That's a question you don't expect I can answer. It remains for us to know where Abel is, and we'll hope he's quartered aboard Barney's ship."

I burned to be in motion that we might the sooner learn all which would give us fair grounds for hope. It seemed like a wilful waste of time to be crouching there behind the rocks when we might discover what would be of greatest importance, and yet did I have sufficient wit to hold my tongue, for one would have been crazed indeed had he ventured out in the broad day.

I was not the only member of the party whose heart was being devoured with impatience. Even Seth Hartley appeared eager to be off; but we could do no more than remain in hiding until there was some reasonable show of being able to finish the journey without coming across the enemy.

And so it was we lay there counting the seconds, wishing as earnestly for the coming of the night as ever a dungeon prisoner longed to see the sun, and yet, save in our imagination, the moments passed no more quickly, nor less swiftly, because of our desires.

An hundred times after the night had come did I say to myself that we should make a move, and as often I realized that the time was not yet at hand.

When, as nearly as we could judge, it was midnight, Abraham said with a long-drawn sigh of relief:

"I reckon it's as safe now for us to make the break as it ever will be. We must give ourselves time to go there and back before break of day, for mayhap no hiding place will be found nearabout where the ship lays, an' we shall be glad to come here again to find cover."

There were no preparations needed for the remainder of the journey. We had partaken of our food often, as a means of making the time seem to pass more quickly, and if I could have quenched my thirst I should have been in good bodily condition for the tramp; but that was of small importance, and I put it from my mind as much as possible, even though the desire for water was great upon me.

Off we set in the same order as on leaving Peter Snyder's hut; but the way was not as clear before us. Owing to the heat and beauty of the night many were astir, and more than once, even while we were in the thickets or among the hills, was it necessary for us to crouch amid the foliage to avoid what might have been an unpleasant meeting.

Because of such delays much more time was spent in making the journey than we had allowed, and if so be we failed to find a snug hiding place on the shore, the return to the quarry might be attended with considerable danger.

The stars gave so much light that when we were finally come to where a view of the bay could be had, there was no trouble in making out all the objects in the vicinity nearly as well as at noonday, and Seth Hartley cried as we gazed out over the water from behind a screen of bushes:

"There is the prison ship, an' she's none other than the Good Hope! Twenty-four hours ago I wouldn't have believed that our luck could be so good! Now it's in my mind that, if we can remain hidden securely, it will be only a question of time before Abel Grant knows we are on hand to do whatsoever we may!"

"You mean that Barney Nelson will carry a message?" I whispered.

"Ay, lad, I'll go bail he'll do that much, for his oath to the king don't bind his tongue. Everythin' depends on our hidin' place, an' the sooner that has been found the sooner we'll know whether we've come here on a fool's errand or not."

Abraham, who had heard the words, now crept outside the bushes to look around, and I, knowing he was better acquainted with the shore than either Sam or I, depended on him to lead us from this point.

"There's a little creek down yonder where the bushes grow thickly, or did before the Britishers came," he whispered after taking a long survey of the shore, as he pointed to the southward of where we were crouching. "I'm afraid it wouldn't avail us if the lobster-backs roam around freely; but it's the only shelter I know of within a mile or more."

"Let's have a look at it," Seth Hartley said hurriedly. "We haven't any too much time, an' can't afford to loiter here."

We were forced to go well inland in order to come upon the place of which Abraham had spoken, and a good hour of time was spent before we were among the bushes where the buzzing of mosquitoes told that there would be little rest for those who were forced to remain within shelter of the foliage.

"It's the only bit of cover I know of," Abraham said as if apologizing for the lack of natural advantages; "but from here, if so be we're not routed out by curious lobster-backs, we can have a full view of all who pass to an' fro between the ship an' the shore."

Seth Hartley explored the entire place, which did not cover more than an acre and was largely made up of swamp, before giving any opinion. Then he said with a forced show of cheerfulness:

"I've seen better hidin' places; but reckon this will serve our turn for a while. Those who come on shore to stretch their legs won't be likely to stray into such a swamp as this, an' we have only to keep well back amid the bushes."

Even to do this it was necessary that considerable work should be done, for no fellow could count on being able to stand knee-deep in mud and water any great length of time, and we set about breaking down bushes and willows to make a bed which would uphold the weight of all four.

As a matter of course we were obliged to work with the utmost caution lest we betray our whereabouts to some sharp-eared sentry on the ship, and it was necessary to make wise choice of the bushes to be broken down, otherwise the evidences of our work could be seen by those who passed along the shore.

We worked like beavers until the gray streaks in the sky told that a new day was dawning, and even then our refuge was anything but satisfactory. We had not been able to gather sufficient material to make a dry bed, and when all four had crawled upon it the water stood here and there in sufficient quantity to keep our garments well saturated. The mosquitoes were plentiful and hungry, and a fellow might spend every moment trying to keep them at a distance, without coming anywhere near succeeding.

"It's goin' to be pretty tough lines, if we have to stay here very long," Abraham said as he curled

up on the watery bed and strove to keep the winged pests from his face, and Seth replied gravely:

"We can't hope to finish our work quickly, for it's a case of waitin' till we get a chance to speak alone with Barney Nelson. I'd be willin' to take my full share of greater discomforts than are to be found here, if by so doin' I could have a hand in workin' a good turn for the fellow who has been a friend to me."

"I reckon that's the way we all feel," Abe said with a grin; "but you must admit that it's goin' to be pretty tough."

"We'll get used to the mosquitoes after a spell," Sam suggested hopefully.

"That may be, though it seems impossible; but what about something to drink?" I asked. "My tongue is as dry as a bone."

"Here is water in plenty," and Seth pointed to the muddy liquid that oozed up among our bed of brush. "It must be fresh, an' by waitin' till it settles a bit, we can have what will be better than many of our sailors get on a long voyage."

If Seth Hartley, a lobster-back, could be cheerful under such circumstances, when he was helping those who had made him a prisoner, then surely it was not for us lads to grumble, and I said as much to my mates, whereupon the Britisher replied with a smile:

"It may be that I'm blossomin' out into a rebel, though I much misdoubt it. You people are workin' pluckily in what looks to be a one-sided fight, an' I shouldn't be sorry to lend a hand, if so be my oath didn't prevent it, in order to see fair play. In this case, however, I'm tryin' to pay Abel Grant for what he's done in my behalf since

I fell into your hands, an' if the effort don't cost more than hidin' in this place a few days, I shall believe that I haven't paid a very high price."

"If Barney Nelson is anythin' like you, we stand a good chance of seein' Abel before a great while," Sam said in a tone of admiration, and Seth added gravely:

"We will at least be able to send word that we're here tryin' our best to serve him, an' that will go far toward cheerin' the poor fellow."

Then we fell silent, for the day was dawning so swiftly that we did not dare longer to indulge in conversation, and I occupied myself with watching the water around me grow clearer and clearer until at last I ventured to quench my thirst, though it was necessary to close my eyes else I could not have swallowed the disagreeable looking mixture.

Before an hour had passed we could see boats passing to and fro between the ship and the shore, and the beach, a short distance above where we lay hidden, soon became quite gay with sailors and marines who, as Seth explained, had been given a chance to stretch their legs.

Because of being able to see so much going on around us, the time did not pass as slowly as I had fancied it would, and Seth kept us amused by telling stories of this man or that who came within our range of vision. Before the day was half spent it seemed as if we were really acquainted with a dozen or more of the marines, and already knew by sight at least two who might be willing to aid us to a certain extent if Seth could have a private interview with them.

Shortly after noon our marine pointed out Barney Nelson, who was coming ashore with half a

dozen others, and both surprised and frightened us by announcing:

"I'm goin' to take the chances of creepin' well inland in the poor hope that Barney may come that way. You're to stay here, even though anythin' should go wrong with me, for in case I'm taken there's no good reason to show yourselves when you can't lend any aid."

"Why is there any chance of your bein' taken?" I whispered. "Do you think Barney might do you an ill turn?"

"Not a bit of it; I'll answer for him. There's no knowin' who I might stumble upon, an' there are mean Englishmen enough belongin' to the Good Hope to lay me by the heels if the chance offered. I'd be counted as a deserter, if found hangin' 'round here makin' no effort to rejoin my ship, an' some of my old mates might be glad to see me danglin' from the yard-arm."

He was gone before I could make reply; but then I understood what had not come into my mind before, which was that of us all who were trying to do Abel Grant a good turn, Seth Hartley was running the greatest risk. If we lads were discovered, we would be made prisoners of war, whereas if he fell into the custody of his old mates, a shameful death must follow, for his officers would set him down as a deserter despite anything that could be said by us in his favor.

CHAPTER XV.

A RASH VENTURE.

WHEN Seth crept away on the poor chance that Barney Nelson might happen to wander where it would be possible to get speech with him secretly, I began to realize more thoroughly than ever before the risks which we who hoped to aid Abel Grant were taking, and it was by no means a pleasing subject for reflection.

If misfortune came upon us, its lightest form would be imprisonment on board one of the ships, and it did not require any severe tax on the imagination to picture the horrors of such punishment. In case we were discovered and attempted to resist arrest, there would be little compunction in taking our lives, for as a rule the soldiers of his majesty believed a dead colonist was of more value than a live one.

Not until Seth Hartley crept through the foliage bent on taking the chances of being able to attract the attention of Barney Nelson without exposing himself to the view of the others, did I fully understand how great was his hazard in this game of life and death which we were playing.

Even though all the facts could be made known, his commander would adjudge him a deserter, for there was no question but that he had remained

with us willingly after once having been made prisoner, instead of insisting upon being treated as a captive, and this in itself would insure a most shameful death for him in event of our rash venture going awry.

With this knowledge come upon me thus suddenly, I found it difficult to prevent myself from calling upon him to return without further effort to aid Abel Grant, for now it was to me as if he could not escape detection — as if even the friend in whom he was about to put every trust, would betray him to death.

If at that moment Luther Stedman had been in my power, I verily believe I would have murdered him in cold blood, because the miserable Tory cur was personally responsible for our danger. We had attacked him only when he came in our way, bent on doing the Cause an injury at our expense, and to avenge himself for that which he had brought upon himself, the cowardly whelp had given all his time to the sneaking work of betraying us to the British.

"If he ever crosses my path again I will deal with him as I would a vicious cur, giving no heed to my own safety," I said to myself, finding some little satisfaction in thus registering an oath of vengeance, never dreaming how near at hand was the moment when it could be carried into effect.

It must not be supposed that I gave myself wholly up to such dismal and vengeful thoughts to the exclusion of everything else. We three lads were watching with painful intentness everything within our range of vision, fearing to hear an outcry which would tell that Seth Hartley had been discovered, and on the alert to give him timely warn-

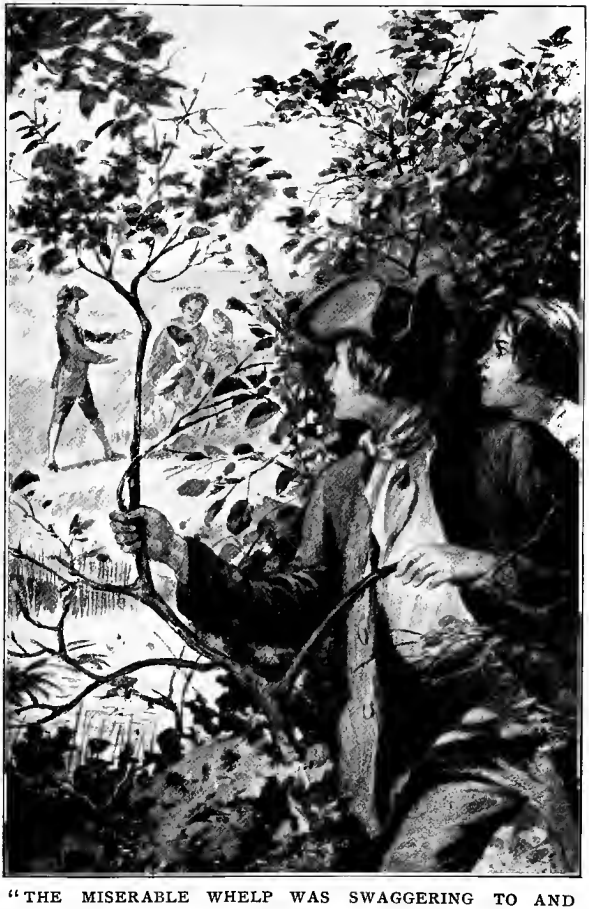
ing of danger, if indeed that should be possible.

We had spread out before us a most animated picture. As the day grew older the activity everywhere around us increased. Officers came ashore from the Good Hope bent on communicating with the commanders of the land forces, and the boats' crews awaited their return on the beach, ready to carry them back to the ship. Squads of ten or a dozen men were landing at frequent intervals to enjoy a short time of shore leave, and in our hiding place we were absolutely surrounded by armed men wearing the uniform of the king.

It only needed that one a trifle more curious than the others should take it into his head to explore the swamp, and our capture was inevitable. Therefore it can well be understood that our hearts were in our throats as we watched keenly every movement of the enemy, and that the mosquitoes sucked their fill of our blood, for so tensely were our nerves strung that the stings of the insects passed unheeded.

I will not undertake to say how much of the day was spent before we lads were startled and angered by seeing Luther Stedman strutting to and fro amid the idle marines and soldiers. We had given no heed to anything save the possibility of Seth Hartley's capture, and it might have been noon, or no more than nine o'clock in the morning, when Abraham gripped my arm with a force that almost caused a cry of pain, as he pointed up shore a short distance where were two waiting boats and their crews of sailors.

During a dozen seconds or more I gazed stupidly in the direction indicated, seeing nothing more than had been passing before my eyes since the moment



"THE MISERABLE WHELP WAS SWAGGERING TO AND FRO."

Seth disappeared amid the foliage, and then it was as if the blood in my veins suddenly began to boil, for there stood Luther Stedman, the Tory cur who had not dared to seek revenge in a manly fashion, but had cajoled the enemy into acting as his cat's-paw.

The miserable whelp was swaggering to and fro as if in command of all the forces, and I knew he was trying to persuade those who were willing to spend the time listening to him, that he was the most important thing on the island.

"He has come here to crow over Abel!" Sam whispered, while Abraham's clutch on my arm was tightened, and I pictured to myself our comrade ironed and helpless in the hold of the Good Hope, forced to listen to the gibes and taunts of that cowardly Tory.

Now it was that for the moment we forgot Seth Hartley — no longer strained our ears fearing to hear that which would tell us he had been taken prisoner by his old shipmates. All our thoughts as well as our eyes, were centered on that cur whom I hoped some day to have by the throat where we two were secure from interference.

"I'll kill that whelp soon!" Abraham whispered hoarsely, and I could not restrain myself from replying:

"He belongs to me, an' you're not to lay hands on him until I have worked my will!"

It was Sam who saw a gleam of the comical in our thus wrangling as to who should pay the score we owed Luther, and he whispered as a smile overspread his face:

"I'm of opinion that you fellows had better get your necks out of the halter which is well nigh

around them, before you squabble over the question of servin' Luther out. It strikes me that he has the upper hands just now, an' is in a position to say whether he or you may be allowed to make reprisals."

My face crimsoned as I realized that Abraham and I had shown ourselves simples by thus speaking as if it was within our power to do as we pleased. The odds were strongly in favor of Luther's laying us by the heels before we were able to raise a hand against him, for by a single word he could send a thousand men scurrying after us, whereas we did not dare even to show our faces.

I tried to look in another direction, for the sight of him caused my stomach to revolt; but despite my will I was forced to watch his every movement, and surely never was punishment greater than mine at this moment. My brain was in a whirl, and it would not have been surprising if, forgetting all else, I had rushed out to throttle him. If at that moment my hands had been around his throat, not all the soldiers in the British army could have torn them away until the breath had been choked from his worthless carcass.

It seemed to me as if we had been gazing at that Tory a full hour before there came into my mind the thought of Seth Hartley, and the danger in which he stood.

During all this while no sound, other than might have been made by the sailors or marines as they went here and there like children at play, had come to our ears, and most like it was this absence of danger signals which allowed us to forget momentarily the man who was staking his life to aid our comrade.

However, even then I did not bestow much thought upon the friendly Britisher who might within a short time be dangling from the yard-arm of the Good Hope, so intent was I, despite my wish, upon watching Luther Stedman.

From his movements I fancied he was striving to persuade some of the sailors to take him off to the ship, and I knew full well that his desire to be there was only that he might jibe Abel Grant when the poor fellow was unable to make reply or reprisals.

Now and then one of the Britishers would shake his head decidedly, as if in answer to an entreaty from Luther. Once when an officer came down to be taken on board, the Tory cur appealed to him, and I could have hugged the red-coated, gilt-laced servant of the king, when I saw him shake off impatiently the miserable leech that would have fawned upon him.

It is impossible for me to say how long Luther Stedman thus strove to gain a passage to the ship; it seemed as if more than an hour had passed before he apparently gave up all hope of succeeding, and then, to my mingled surprise and dismay, he lounged along the beach in our direction as if having decided to consort no longer with those whom he was so eager to call friends.

I know not into whose mind the idea first came; but it was to me as if I had turned it over and over an hundred times, when Abraham clutched me by the arm, his face crimsoned with passion, as he whispered:

"If that whelp comes this way, an' gives me but half a chance, I'll stake my life on serving him out!"

"An' it would be stakin' your life, lad," Sam said nervously. "Surely you would not be simple enough to have any dealin's with him here, when you know a single cry from the scoundrel would bring all those men upon us, an' thus put an end to any effort of ours in Abel Grant's behalf."

Just for an instant it was as if Abraham repented of the threat, and then he shut his teeth tightly, literally hissing the words:

"If he tempts me I shall take the chances!"

So far had anger against the lad who had worked us so much harm gained ascendency over me, that I was unable to consider calmly the situation. I forgot, strange as it may seem, that we were surrounded by an enemy who would discover us at the lightest sound; that the least false move on our part would insure imprisonment on board the Good Hope, and thus would be fatal to the chances, if indeed we had any, of lending Abel Grant a hand. I thought only of the desire for revenge, and held my peace when I should have insisted that Abraham give over any such wild thoughts.

Sam did not make further protest, most like because he believed Abraham's threat was simply a safety-valve to his temper, and that he would not be wild enough to do other than remain silent and motionless within this poor refuge of ours.

As to myself, I gave no heed to either Sam or Abe; but kept my eyes fixed upon that miserable specimen of a lad who was walking slowly and carelessly, but yet surely, toward where we lay in hiding.

It seemed to me then, even as it does now, that the judgment of the Lord was heavy upon Luther

Stedman at that moment, causing him to advance directly to his undoing — as if he had, because of his many sins against his country, been delivered into our power, and without allowing the thought to shape itself definitely in my mind, I was firmly convinced that within a certain short time he would be our prisoner.

If one of us had held that cur by the hand he could not have moved more in accord with our feverish desires, for, leaving the sailors and marines an hundred yards or more up the beach, he came directly along to where the little creek, which drained the marsh in which we lay, ran into the sea, and then aimlessly, as if against his own will, he advanced along the edge of the stream, picking his way daintily over the soft ground.

Involuntarily I glanced toward Abraham who, on one knee, was leaning forward like some beast of prey ready to make a spring, and the knowledge that he was minded to leap upon Luther Stedman, if peradventure that miserable whelp gave him the opportunity, caused everything to vanish from my mind save the possibility of revenge.

Even to this day I dare swear Luther Stedman did not come up that tiny creek of his own free will; but was moved by some stronger power to deliver himself into our keeping, for verily there was no reason why any person should strive to pick his way amid that slime, except bent on duty or revenge, and he had neither in his heart; but came on carelessly, seemingly ignorant of what he did until within a scant ten paces of where we lay upon the bed of reeds.

Now it was that even Sam forgot his prudence — forgot that which seemed positive would follow

if we made ever so slight a move, and was standing to the best of his ability upon the frail platform of brush ready to join in whatsoever we did.

Even now I fail to understand why it was that the Tory cur did not so much as raise his eyes; but came on blindly as if with the single purpose of delivering himself up to us, and we accepted what was neither more nor less than an invitation from him.

It was Abraham who set the pace, although no more than the twinkling of an eye could have elapsed from the time he sprang out, as a panther springs upon his prey, when I was by his side, with Sam so close upon my heels that he was like to have tripped me.

The first intimation Luther Stedman had of the danger that awaited him was the splashing of water as we three leaped into the swamp regardless as to whether we gave an alarm to the Britishers or not, and even then the miserable whelp did not raise his eyes until we had him firmly by the throat, both Abraham and I, with a grip which could not be shaken off, in such fashion that to have uttered the lightest whisper would have been impossible.

Down, down into the slime we forced him until nothing save his face was above the surface, and I, literally crazed by anger and the knowledge that I had the whelp in my power, would have drowned him as one does a kitten, most like to have repented sorely at some later day, but that Abraham, having more command over himself, said in a whisper:

"For three to kill one, however much death is deserved, would be cowardly murder, and, besides,

I'm not minded that he shall escape from this world so easily."

Then it was that Sam, suspecting what was in my heart, placed both his hands under that Tory's head to raise it from the mud, and as he did so thrust a bunch of leaves, hastily stripped from the bushes nearby, into the cur's mouth, for already was he gasping for breath.

It was this movement that restored Abraham and me to our senses, so to speak, and straightway in the stead of revenge, there came to us the knowledge that unless we would sacrifice Seth Hartley, must we take every precaution, for if we were discovered it was certain he would speedily hang from the yard-arm of the Good Hope.

And now, cautious as an instant before we had been reckless, we set about trussing him up in such fashion as would prevent his moving hand or foot, and even while this was being done, there came to me the question of what would be the next move. We had come there to aid Abel Grant, but now were we hampered with a prisoner whom, whatever peril should arise, we dared not set free, and at the same time would not murder in cold blood even though he so richly deserved such a fate.

It was a venture born of passion, although I afterward strove to excuse myself by saying that we were literally forced into acting as we did otherwise he would have discovered us, and now must we pay the penalty of failing to rule our spirits.

If through this mad act of ours Seth Hartley was captured and hanged, or if it should be learned that a movement was on foot to release Abel Grant,

then was the blood of both these men on our heads, and in my heart I cursed the miserable cur who had so far tempted me that I forgot everything save desire for revenge.

It is not to be supposed that I stood idly by, knee-deep in the mud, turning all these things over in my mind, for there was much to be done if we would rectify the mistake, which is a mild term for our act.

As I have said, Sam had on the spur of the moment thrust a double handful of leaves into Luther's mouth, which was forced open by our hold on his throat, and it only remained for us to so fetter his limbs that he would be powerless to flounder about in the hope of attracting the attention of his friends.

It goes without saying that we had nothing with us in the shape of a rope, but I, to make atonement for what just then seemed little less than a crime, pulled off my shirt, baring my body to the mosquitoes, and tore the garment into strips. With these we bound the lad whom we had taken prisoner for a third time, so securely that I question if he could have moved hand or foot even the fraction of an inch in either direction.

The sleeves of Abraham's shirt served for a more secure gag then that of leaves, and when all this had been done we lifted the Tory from out his muddy bed on to the frail platform of bushes, where he lay with the slime forming as it were a shroud about him.

When he was thus secured and in position, a single glance at the cur's face was sufficient to tell how severe had been the punishment we inflicted,

for if ever I saw abject terror in the eyes of any human being, it was reflected from his. I have no question but that the miserable whelp believed we would kill him off hand, as indeed we had the right to do if one thinks of the provocation, and the benefit which his death would be to the Cause.

He watched us mutely, perforce, and with an intentness which told that he was suffering the agony of death in anticipation, and I, minded that he should be kept in suspense, motioned Sam and Abe to follow me yet a little further into the swamp, where we might speak without his overhearing the words, for I desired he should believe we had murder in our hearts.

Standing waist-deep in the mud and water where we could keep the Tory well in view, and were not in danger of being seen by the Britishers nearabout, we discussed the situation in whispers, realizing now that the danger was increased tenfold because we had yielded to our desire for revenge.

"I'm willin' to agree that we've made idiots of ourselves, an' risked over an' over again the life of Seth Hartley by capturin' that miserable Tory," Abraham began before I could speak, and much as if he knew what was in my mind; "but since we have again made him prisoner, I promise you that unless I myself am killed he shall not escape, for from this out he is my especial charge."

"But surely we cannot keep him here," Sam said nervously. "It will be a little short of a miracle if we ourselves can remain without detection, an' if peradventure the opportunity should come for us to aid Abel Grant, how may we be of

any service if our movements are hampered by him?"

"But yet I am not minded to kill him in cold blood," I said, believing for the moment that it was in Sam's mind we should put an end to his miserable existence.

"God forbid!" the lad whispered fervently. "Yet how may we set him free, for when it comes to a question of his life or Abel's, we must not hesitate, even though by letting him go we have condemned ourselves?"

"I will take charge of that part of the business," Abraham said decidedly, and by his tone I understood that already he had some plan in mind. "If by any happy chance there comes an opportunity for us to strike a blow in behalf of Abel Grant, you lads and Seth Hartley can do as much without, as with me, an' the success of the undertakin' will not be in jeopardy by my absence."

"By your absence?" I repeated, mystified by the words.

"Ay, that was what I said, an' when the night comes, if so be I am still at liberty, it is my intent to take yonder whelp an' run the risk of gainin' Peter Snyder's hut. Once there, with the old man to lend a hand as jailor, an' I dare venture to swear under such guardianship Luther Stedman will never be able to escape, I may return, unless the conditions have so been changed that it is unnecessary."

"The chances are as an hundred to one against your reachin' Peter Snyder's hut, even though you traveled alone, therefore what hope could you have of makin' the journey in safety, hampered by a

prisoner?" I cried, absolutely frightened by Abraham's proposition.

"An' yet nevertheless shall I make the attempt," the lad said stoutly and in a tone which showed that it was useless to combat the decision. "It seems to me that ever since we set out to do whatsoever we might for the Cause, all our time has been spent in capturin' that Tory cur, only to have him give us the slip later. Now he is in our power, an' instead of turnin' him over to some one else, I will make certain that he works no further mischief."

I did not continue the argument, and for two reasons. The first because I was convinced it would be useless to make any attempt at dissuading Abraham from that upon which he had resolved, and again, I realized that instead of standing there where the surrounding enemy was cut off from our view, we were neglecting in some degree, I could not say exactly how, Seth Hartley's interests. Therefore it was I said with more of irritation in my tone than was warranted:

"We must go back where we can keep watch, lest somethin' should suddenly demand our goin' to Seth's assistance. Once there, however, let us be guarded in speech, for Luther Stedman believes we have it in mind to murder him, an' I would not so far relieve his anxiety as to let him understand that we only count on holdin' him prisoner. Because he has escaped scot free twice before, ordinary captivity will not cause him any great uneasiness."

Abraham started back toward the platform of twigs as if eager to put an end to the conversation

lest we insist that he abandon the plan in his mind, and once gaining that slight refuge from the water and mud, we looked out again upon the scene presented by the enemy.

So far as could be judged, the slight noise we made in capturing Luther had not aroused any suspicion. The marines were loitering here and there; the sailors were waiting by their boats, or lying at full length on the sand, and one might say with every assurance that we had thus far done no harm in having given way to our passionate desires.

It was while we remained there silently gazing upon the enemy, that I saw the marine who had been pointed out to us as Barney Nelson coming down the incline of the land, as if from the rear of the swamp where we were in hiding, and instantly a great hope sprang up in my heart, which I voiced by whispering to Abraham:

"I believe of a verity Seth Hartley has had speech with his friend. Look you! There goes the marine alone, as if havin' come from the direction where Seth was last seen, an'—"

I did not finish the sentence, for at that instant a light splashing of the water could be heard a short distance away, and as we three gazed the form of our British friend appeared among the foliage, with an expression of most intense satisfaction on his face.

Forgetting for an instant Luther Stedman, I half-turned to hear his story, and was astonished because of the look of amazement which overspread his face. Immediately I realized that he was bewildered at seeing the prisoner, and said hurriedly, speaking with the utmost caution:

"That Tory came our way, an' it was a case of capturin' him or bein' discovered."

"How did you do it?" he asked as if mystified. "I have not been above an hundred feet away at any time, an' yet heard no noise."

"The slime of the swamp served our friend," I said, and smiling even while my anxiety was so great. "We can speak of him later; tell us what you have done?"

"I have had speech with Barney Nelson, an' that at a time when I had well nigh given up all hope of comin' face to face with him alone."

"And he?" I asked, fearing to put the question into words.

"He will do whatsoever he may so that it be not against the oath he has taken to serve the king; but lad, it needs not I should tell you that even though Barney were willin' to do everythin' a man could, the chances of releasin' Abel Grant are mighty slim."

"Is he aboard yonder ship?"

"Yes, as are nigh to two hundred others who were taken prisoners in the battle. The Good Hope is to be moved up nearer the town when it shall have been taken, an' meanwhile all Barney can do is to tell our friend that we are waiting for an opportunity to lend a hand."

"Surely you have been successful even beyond my hopes," I replied fervently, thankful because this little had been accomplished. "Now what are we to do?"

"Before seein' yonder prisoner I should have said there was nothin' which could be done, save wait in the poor hope that some turn or chance might show us a way to help him; but now I am

all at sea, for suppose this moment we should find a way open to get at him, how can we make a move while that Tory is held by you?"

Then it was that Abe explained what was his purpose, and much to my surprise Seth Hartley seemed to agree with him. Afterward I came to understand that he was accepting cheerfully the only possible solution of the difficulty, for we must get rid of Luther, and yet could not afford to set him at liberty.

"There is no possibility that we shall see Barney Nelson again until mornin'," Seth said after a brief time of silence. "His shore-leave is about expired, an' mayhap he will not have another within eight and forty hours; but yet must we wait, for in him is our only hope."

"Will you come back, having left the Tory with Peter Snyder?" I asked of Abraham, shielding my mouth in such fashion that the prisoner could not hear the question, and the lad replied:

"That is for Seth Hartley to say. If so be I can serve the plan, then will I leave the Tory with old Peter, believing he'll be more faithful to the charge than any other we could select; but I much prefer to have the scoundrel in my own keeping, an' then if the enemy should suddenly appear, showin' that he could not fail of bein' released, I would take his life with my own hands rather than let him go free again."

To this blood-thirsty remark Seth Hartley gave no heed; but at once began outlining a plan for Abraham to get away with the Tory, in the course of which he said:

"Since it is certain that we shall not be able

to do anythin' in behalf of Abel Grant within the next four an' twenty hours at the least, why not take Ephraim and Sam with you in case you should come upon such a small force as could be overcome?"

"I will have no one run the risk but myself. If either of the lads went with me, then would the danger be doubled, since he who thus lent a hand would be forced to return, an' one portion of the journey is as dangerous as another," Abraham said decidedly. "If it is agreed there is no real reason for me to come back, then all the risk must be mine."

"Ay, an' you are right, lad," Seth Hartley said quietly, and to one who was ignorant of the situation there would have been no suspicion that these two talking so quietly, were discussing a matter which meant the life or death of all concerned. "We will carry our prisoner out through the swamp when midnight shall have come, since to trust him to walk would be dangerous. Then you must be guided by whatsoever occurs, for no one can say what should or should not be done."

"Ay, that I know full well, an' you may trust me to get him there, or else both of us will die on the way," Abe said emphatically, and that ended the conversation regarding the keeping in our custody of Luther Stedman.

But for the fact that we had a prisoner, our hearts would have been very light now since communication had been opened up with Barney Nelson and he had agreed to carry word of our whereabouts to Abel; but as it was, every nerve was strained to its utmost tension, and when after a

long while Seth Hartley proposed that we try to gain some sleep, leaving one on watch, I could have laughed at the idea, for slumber at that moment was as far from my eyelids as was the sense of security from my heart.

CHAPTER XVI.

A RAY OF HOPE.

It is beyond my power to set down a fair account of what we said and did during this day when we lay amid the slime, covered with mosquitoes, and surrounded by the enemy. A stranger could not understand the feelings which were ours as we guarded Luther Stedman lest peradventure he slip his bonds sufficiently to make so much noise as would attract attention, knowing that at any moment it was not only possible, but probable, the tables would be turned completely, putting us at his mercy.

At one moment I would be aglow with satisfaction because at last we had laid the scoundrel by the heels, and believed we knew beyond a question how he could be held secure so long as we pleased. Then would come the knowledge that the slightest curiosity on the part of those who surrounded us would lead to our discovery, and the cold chills crept down my back as I pictured ourselves prisoners, where Luther could gloat over us even if he did no worse.

At another time I could see, in my mind's eye, Abel Grant in the hold of the prison ship, so closely guarded that there was no ray of hope, however slight, of our being able to lend him a hand.

Then I could see all our little party keeping him company in his cramped quarters with no possibility of being released save by death, or when the war had come to an end.

I speculated, with the numbness of fear in my heart, as to where my father and mother might be at that moment, and doubted whether we would ever come together again in this world; but all the while I shared with my comrades the watch which it seemed necessary we should keep upon the throngs of men on every hand, although what it would have profited to know when they might be coming upon us I could not have said, for of a verity we were unable to offer any resistance worth the name, in event of their entering the swamp.

Only at rare intervals did one or the other speak; it was not a time when a fellow would be inclined for conversation. Early in the afternoon Seth Hartley again insisted we should try to gain some rest; but it would have been useless for me to make any attempt at wooing slumber, and instead of following his advice I urged Abraham that it was his duty to do so because of the long tramp before him, which caused the lad to reply:

"I fancy my eyes are open quite as wide as yours, an' to close them would be impossible. When I am in Peter Snyder's hut, where the redcoats do not swarm so thickly as here, I may be able to sleep, but not now."

"An' how do you count on goin' there?" Sam asked, rather that he might break the dull monotony by speech, than from any real desire for information.

"I don't know, an' had rather not talk about it," was the almost petulant reply. "It must all be

a matter of good or bad luck, an' my upper lip will be the stiffer if I don't dwell overly long upon the chances."

Until this had been said I believed Abraham felt confident he could make the journey with comparative ease; but now I understood that he misdoubted his ability to get through, yet was ready to risk his life in the effort, to the end that he might pay the scoundrelly Tory off in some of his own coin, and all this did not tend to make me feel any more comfortable in mind.

Twice during the afternoon did Seth Hartley take the gag from Luther's mouth in order to pour down his throat a few drops of muddy water, and when Sam insisted that he was wasting both time and sympathy, the Britisher said quietly:

"I know full well how much I suffered while lyin' in the cabin of the sloop trussed up in the same fashion, an' then there was no chance for so much sufferin' because the day was not so hot. I'm never fearin' but that you lads count on dealin' justly by him, an' am certain it's not in your minds to act the part of brutes."

Only once during the afternoon did any of the enemy come within an hundred feet of where we lay, wet with mud and water and beset by mosquitoes, and then during a bad ten minutes did it appear as if Luther Stedman's hour of triumph was close at hand.

A party of marines lounged aimlessly down the shore until coming to the mouth of the creek, and one proposed to follow up the water-course simply out of idle curiosity. He even advanced a few paces to carry out such attention, and I saw Abraham clutch the rifle we had kept with us all this

time, as if determined to sell his life dearly rather than be carried aboard the ship as a prisoner.

The fellow did not get very far on his voyage of discovery; at the second step he plunged knee-deep in the mud, whereupon he drew back amid the jeers and laughter of his companions, and the party moved away to where a boat was just being drawn up on the shore.

Now and then we munched at the hard biscuit, not because we were hungry, but in order that we might have something with which to occupy the time. I had never believed food would be distasteful, particularly when I had much the same as fasted for eight and forty hours, but on this day I found it impossible to swallow the bread even after chewing it, though it was sweet and palatable.

What a blessed relief it was to see the sun sink behind the hills of Staten Island! I had thought the night would never come, and longed for the darkness as a thirsty man does for water, but yet no sooner was the night at hand than my anxiety became all the greater, for Abraham's journey was yet to be performed — a journey which I feared he would never live to finish.

One by one the boats returned to the ship until the shore was deserted. We could hear the cries of the sentries, however, which caused it to seem as if they were close at hand, and the riding lights of the prison ship sent ominous rays across the water.

"I reckon it will be safe to crawl out on dry land now, an' thus have a chance to stretch our legs," Seth Hartley said when the evening had grown old. "There's little show of any one comin' ashore at this hour, an' even though that

should happen, we'll be hidden by the bushes on the hill."

Abraham and Seth took Luther Stedman up as if his had been a lifeless body, carrying him through the swamp to the higher land beyond, and there we walked about a bit, taking due care, however, not to show ourselves beyond the gloom of the shadows cast by the bushes.

Another hour passed in almost perfect silence, and then Sam asked abruptly:

"Shall you take the musket, Abe?"

"I'll leave that for you; it won't pay to hamper myself with so much luggage, an' a stout club will serve me better if I should come to close quarters with a Tory — I'm not afraid of meetin' any lobster-backs on the road I shall travel."

Then Abe searched here and there until he found a cudgel such as promised to serve his purpose, and nothing more was said for so long a time that I was like to have cried aloud with impatience, when Seth Hartley spoke:

"I'm allowin', lad, that it's time for you to set off. Don't be rash if you meet with enemies; but remember that it's better to surrender than be put out of the fight forever."

"I'm not minded to be taken prisoner that such as he may crow over me," Abe replied in what a stranger might have believed was a surly tone.

"His crowin' can do you no real harm, while by compassin' your own death you would be deprivin' the Cause you serve of a pair of arms that may yet strike many a sound blow in behalf of the colonists."

It sounded strange to hear a Britisher give such advice; but Seth was already considerably more

than half an American, and I doubted not that he would soon be ready to cast in his fortunes with those of us who were battling against the king.

Abraham's preparations for the perilous journey consisted simply in casting off the bonds from Luther Stedman's legs, and when this had been done he aided the Tory to regain his feet, saying meanwhile:

"You an' I need to have a fair understandin' one with the other, for the chances are much in favor of our meetin' death in company. I want you to bear well in mind that I count on knockin' you in the head with this club, rather than allow an escape. I am not overly eager to have you live, yet haven't the heart to kill in cold blood. If, however, you should make any attempt to give me the slip, or try to create such a disturbance as would give information of your whereabouts, I shall have all the excuse needed, an' will slay you with a right good will. You are to walk at your best pace, save when I give the word to slow down or halt, an' then it will be safest for you to obey the first command, for you'll never be able to hear a second. Now move on, an' for your own sake don't let the grass grow under your feet."

I had thought Abraham would say some word of farewell; but when Luther meekly yet quickly obeyed the command, he followed straight behind the prisoner's heels up the hill, never once turning his head to look behind.

"Well, that's an odd way of leavin' us!" Sam exclaimed in sorrow and surprise. "He might at least have said good-bye, since the chances are we may never meet again."

"He has done wisely," Seth Hartley replied.

"At such a time as this none but the foolish take the risk of unnervin' themselves by words of partin'. He has started, an' God grant he go through in safety, for a right good comrade has he ever shown himself to be."

I cannot describe the sense of abandonment which came over me when Abraham and his prisoner vanished in the distance. Although I would have urged the lad to go speedily rather than linger, it was as if he had forsaken us without warning, and I turned wearily toward the swamp with a feeling that amid the mud and slime of that pestilential place I would find my grave.

Seth Hartley must have understood somewhat of that which was in my mind, for he said in the most friendly of tones as he laid his hand on my shoulder:

"Now are we prepared for work, lad. Until he had started we could do nothin', however favorable a chance might have presented itself. We must think only of that which we would do to aid Abel Grant."

"It is a hopeless undertakin'," I replied disconsolately, and he added in a tone of reproof:

"So it is indeed, lad, if you give up hope, sayin' to yourself that the work can't be done. He who would succeed must believe that the task is well within his powers."

"I'm makin' an ass of myself!" I cried repentantly, "an' will strive not to do so again; but to see Abraham go out into the night to make his way where enemies are thicker than mosquitoes in the swamp, seemed much as if we had come to an end of our rope."

"I grant you that such a partin' was not good

for the nerves; but at a time like this you must strive to put all disagreeable thoughts from your mind, to the end that you may be the better fitted for what the future has in store for us. Now is come the hour when you lads *must* get some sleep, so lie you down here on the solid ground, an' I'll stand guard till it comes my turn to take forty winks. There is no good reason why we need go back into the swamp among the mosquitoes before daybreak."

It is only doing Seth Hartley barest justice when I set down here that which I firmly believe: But for him, the Britisher who would not break his oath to the king, neither of us lads would have come out of that venture alive, for he soothed our fears, bolstered our courage, and looked after our bodily comfort all at the same time, giving no heed to himself.

We strove earnestly to follow the honest fellow's advice. Sam and I stretched ourselves out on the solid ground, lying close together for mutual comfort and the friendly contact of each other's bodies, and although it had seemed as if I could never close my eyes until we had succeeded or failed in our venture, slumber overpowered me even while I was speculating upon Abraham's progress.

Nor did I awaken until I had been shaken into consciousness, and, springing to my feet in alarm, I saw Seth Hartley standing in much the same position as when I fell asleep.

"The day is beginnin' to break, lad, an' it stands us in hand to take up our quarters with the mosquitoes again, for there'll soon be more visitors here than will be pleasin' or safe."

"You have stood watch all night while we selfishly slept!" I said reproachfully.

"I've been on duty no more than three hours, for it was past midnight before you laid down," he replied with a gentle, friendly smile. "A fellow who has spent week after week in a troop ship should be able to sleep anywhere, an' I'll take my nap in the swamp."

By this time Sam was on his feet, and after drinking our fill at a small spring which Seth had found while standing guard, we went to our frail platform of brush, there to soak in the mud and water, and beat off the attacks of the mosquitoes, as best we might without making a noise.

Seth kept his word in regard to taking a nap, for no sooner were we in our disagreeable hiding place than he laid down on the brush, where the water rose a full inch all around him, and before it seemed to me that he had time to compose himself, was sleeping soundly.

The scenes enacted on this second day of our hiding in the swamp were much like those presented in the first. The marines came ashore on leave to find such amusement as the bare earth afforded, and the sailors lounged here and there while waiting upon their officers; but none ventured near our place of refuge.

As nearly as I could judge, the day was about half spent, and Seth yet wrapped in slumber, when Sam and I who were watching jealously all that was passing around us, saw Barney Nelson come ashore from one of the boats. He appeared inclined to wander off by himself, and refused, as we understood by the gestures, to join some of his mates who were going inland over the hills, where-

upon we understood, or believed we did, what was in his mind.

Pressing my hand firmly over Seth's mouth lest he involuntarily cry aloud on being suddenly awakened, I shook him soundly, and on the instant he was looking up into my eyes with an expression which told that he was keenly alive to the situation.

"Barney Nelson has just come ashore, an' appears to be lookin' for a chance to go off by himself," I whispered, and it was as if the words had hardly more than been uttered before he slipped from the platform of brush into the mud and water.

Then he struck off through the swamp, moving with the utmost caution, and we knew he was going to the rendezvous which had, most like, been agreed upon with his friend the previous day.

There was nothing left for Sam and me to do save keep sharp watch on everything around us, and await the return of Seth.

This we did, and when it seemed to us that our marine had been absent two full hours, a slight rippling of the water told that he was returning, greatly to our relief of mind.

Not until he had crawled up on the brush beside us did he speak, and then, when our heads were close together, he whispered cautiously:

"Barney has even more of a mind to help us than I had hoped, an' it all comes from the way Luther Stedman showed his spite when Abel Grant was taken into custody."

"Has he had speech with the poor fellow?" I interrupted, too eager for the information to be willing to wait his way of telling the story.

"Ay, an' he knows that we're here to do what-

soever we may; but sends word that you lads are not to take any chances on his account; he'd rather stay where he is, though we know full well the quarters are anythin' different from comfortable, than have you come to grief."

To this I could make no reply, for my heart was too full. It was like the dear fellow to think of others rather than himself, though if the positions were reversed he would have taken any chance, whatever the peril, in the hope of lending us a hand.

"What about your friend?" Sam asked. "Is there hope he might be willin' to help us if we see any kind of a show to free Abel?"

"Ay, lad, Barney is fast comin' 'round to my way of thinkin' about you colonists who refuse to obey the king, an' declares that when the war is ended, whichever way the matter turns, he'll stay in this country if so be his term of enlistment has expired. Now I don't want to raise any hopes that may be dashed, therefore you must take the statement with many grains of salt when I say that Barney has a scheme in your behalf, though the odds are as ten to one against its workin' our way."

"If it was an hundred to one we'd try it!" I cried, speaking incautiously loud. "What is it?"

"Remember that it's only a bare chance, an everythin' must work our way else it is useless," Seth Hartley replied as if unwilling to give the information lest we should build too many hopes upon it. "As you must know, it is wickedly hot in the hold of the ship, where are stowed more than two hundred of your people. Beginnin' with last night, squad after squad of the prisoners has been

allowed to come on deck for an hour at a time lest they die faster than would be possible to bury 'em. By shiftin' off with one of his mates, Barney can be on duty when we are ready to do our part of it, an' declares that if your man has enough of nerve, he may be able to slip away, though it would be certain death if he was caught tryin' to do the trick."

"Tell it all," I said impatiently. "Abel Grant has nerve enough for any venture however desperate, an' you need not fear to frighten us who have been standin' within the shadow of death since the moment we landed on this island."

"I'm not afraid of frightenin' you, lad; but the words trip on my tongue because of the thought that you'll laugh at me for a fool to propose anythin' so wild. To be short, this is the plan: You are to come here in the sloop on the next night but one; keepin' her out of sight if possible, but pullin' in a skiff to a short distance of the Good Hope at about midnight. If Barney can work the rest, as he claims, Abel Grant will be on deck at the time. He is to let himself over the rail with Barney to screen his movements, an' swim out to you. If so be he can make the distance, an' you take him aboard without bein' seen, it's then a case of gettin' aboard the Swiftsure as soon as may be, an' puttin' to sea. You see, lad, it's a slender chance; but yet far better than we hoped might come our way when we set out on this venture."

"It is well worth the tryin'," Sam said emphatically, "though there are so many quirks which must all fit into each other if it is to be a success, that we may well have doubts about it. Suppose your friend ain't detailed to guard the prisoners on

the night after the next, the trick can't be tried; if the other members of the guard grow suspicious, the fat is in the fire, or if through lack of wind we fail to be nearabout, then will Abel Grant swim to his death."

"Ay, lad, an' if he is seen by the sentries after droppin' into the water, he's well nigh certain of bein' shot. It's best to figure all the chances, an' then say if the game is worth the candle."

"That much I can say now," I whispered earnestly. "No matter how many the chances of death, it is better Abel Grant makes the venture, than that he eat his heart out aboard that ship. Does he know what your friend proposes?"

"Ay, he an' Barney talked it over last night, an' he's eager to try it; but first must know if you're willin' to do your share?"

"He should know that without askin'!" Sam cried indignantly. "Now because of his doubts as to our courage, we must spend another day idly here, when we should be performin' our part of the task. It's by no means certain that the sloop is where we left her, an' if she isn't, we must hunt around for some craft that will answer our purpose."

"You will be wastin' no time, lad, for if Barney fails to see me when next he comes ashore, it will be taken as token that we've left to attend to our part of the business."

"An' we are to set about the work at once?" I cried, almost beside myself with joy at the prospect of doing something, instead of lying there in the swamp idle.

"Ay, as soon as night shall have come," Seth Hartley said gravely; "but you must go over in

your mind once more all the dangers. Suppose we leave here to find the sloop, an' fail in so doin', or come to grief through Tory, or English soldier, then have we doomed Abel Grant to death, for he will make the attempt on the chances that nothin' goes wrong with our end of the business. Then again, we may come upon the Swiftsure without trouble, only to be brought up with a sharp turn by one of the king's ships, in which case your friend will swim on and on without meetin' help, and then, exhausted, sink to death. We shall be strivin' to perform the impossible, and if one cog of the wheel fails to fit exactly with another, the whole machine goes to pieces."

"Abel was ready to take the chances?" I asked.

"Ay, so Barney says."

"An' you believe your mate will do all in his power?"

"Barney won't willingly fail us, though who can say that when the time comes he may not be ordered to other duty, an' you lads are left in the lower bay waitin' for him who is not able to come."

"That doesn't count," I replied impatiently. "To my mind the most important question is as to whether we can do our part on time, and for that Abel Grant trusts us."

"Then we will set off as soon after nightfall as seems safest," Seth said as if the conversation was at an end, and indeed it was for a time, because neither Sam nor I could find words for speculation while our brains were awhirl with the general idea.

Seth Hartley set about breaking his fast with the flint-like biscuits, while we lads sat on the frail

platform silent and motionless, our thoughts going out to this new venture which was as wild and desperate as man could devise.

After a time, however, when we were grown accustomed to the idea, so to speak, we talked of the possibilities of how we might best accomplish our portion of the task, or of what could be done in case the sloop had been captured by the enemy, and thus it was that this last portion of our sojourn in the swamp passed as swiftly as the earlier part had gone slowly.

I was actually surprised when the shadows began to lengthen, to find that the day was nearly done, and, believing that we would set off early, I made ready for the journey by eating heartily of the hard biscuits, Sam following my example.

As on the previous night, one by one the boats returned to the ship, carrying the liberty men and the sailors until it was as if we alone remained on the island.

"I'm allowin' that we'd better hang on here till it's reasonable to believe that those inland, who live on our line of march, have turned in for the night," Seth Hartley said when he saw Sam and I moving about as if to make the start. "It's better to wait an hour too long, than set off to find ourselves prisoners through bein' too impatient."

"In case some one has carried the sloop away, we'll need every minute that can be had in which to find another craft," Sam grumbled, and Seth replied cheerily:

"True for you, lad; but if we set out now an' come upon a roysterin' party of Tories, or a squad of soldiers prowlin' around in search of plunder, we won't be able to say whether the sloop is where

we left her or not. This is a game in which a mistake on the part of a single player will cost one life if no more, an' we can't afford to take any chances, so put a stopper on your impatience."

As a matter of course we knew that Seth Hartley was in the right, and difficult though the task was, I forced myself to await his movements with some little semblance of cheerfulness.

It was not yet midnight, as we afterward came to know, when he finally gave the word. We had already crept out of the swamp, as on the previous night, when the friendly darkness screened our movements, therefore in order to begin the journey it was only necessary to pick up the musket and ammunition which Abraham had foolishly, as I then thought, brought from the sloop.

This time I was the one to lead the way, and although I was by no means as good a guide as Abe Decker, I had no doubts as to my ability to pilot the party without going very far out of a straight course.

I am not going to make any effort at giving the details of that tramp, because our adventures were so many that there is not the time nor the space for them all.

The first came when we were no more than a mile from the swamp, and then, while making our way through a thicket where I could have sworn no human being would be found, we came plump upon three red-coats who, as could readily be seen, had come into the possession of more strong liquor than was wholesome for them.

It was fortunate for us that they were considerably less than half sober, and when we literally over-ran them, causing two to spring un-

steadily to their feet with weapons in hand, Seth Hartley answered their challenge, making it appear by his words that we were a party of marines from the Good Hope out for a lark. Thanks to the darkness, the drunkenness of the men, and Seth's acquaintance with the crew of the prison-ship, we were allowed to go our way unmolested.

The next adventure was brought about by my carelessness. I thought to cross the pasture of a Tory named Graves, whose land lay in our path as I had mapped it out, for by so doing we could save nearly half a mile in distance; but the house dog smelled us out, and his barking aroused the farmer. We did not dare take to our heels lest the Tory should pursue, therefore Sam and I hid behind a brush fence, while Seth Hartley explained that he was making his way across lots to join his ship off Gowanus creek.

No one could mistake Seth for other than an Englishman, owing to his speech, and the Tory sent us on our way with many a soft word, believing he was holding converse with those who loved the king as dearly as he professed to do.

Twice we came upon a single Tory abroad, most likely to spy out some poor Whig, and in each case did Seth speak fairly while Sam and I kept in the shadow that we might not be seen, with the result that never once was our real character suspected, and then, just after daybreak, we were come to the creek on which we had left our gallant little sloop after she had borne us so bravely past all the king's ships.

Verily I had the hardest kind of work to prevent myself from shouting aloud in joy when I saw the end of her topmast above the foliage, thus show-

ing that our enemies had not found her; but I was literally stunned when, on clambering over the rail, I found the cuddy hatch fastened on the inside, thus giving proof that some one had taken possession of her.

CHAPTER XVII.

UNDER FIRE.

I WAS in the advance when we came upon the gallant little Swiftsure lying half concealed by the foliage as when we had been forced to abandon her, and had leaped aboard while my comrades were a dozen or more paces in the rear.

It required no more than ten seconds for me to make the discovery that the hatch was bolted on the inside, thus showing that the cuddy had occupants, and without stopping to question whether it might be prudent thus to raise my voice, I cried:

"There's somebody aboard here! Hurry, lads, for perhaps we set a trap without knowin' it, an' have caught some game!"

Seth Hartley, realizing my folly, for if there were Britishers in the cuddy I was thus much the same as inviting an attack, came up at full speed believing we had lighted upon a hornet's nest, and I had had time to grow more uneasy in mind when the hatch was pushed open.

Now I did indeed cry aloud in astonishment not unmixed with fear, for I fancied it was the face of Abraham Decker that looked out upon me, and yet I knew, or believed I did, that it could not be him in the flesh, for if the lad was alive and at liberty he would be in Peter Snyder's hut.

"Well, have I changed so much in these few hours that you don't know me?" the lad asked as he thrust his head and shoulders through the hatch, and, as I fancied, looked with surprise upon me. "Have you given up tryin' to lend Abel Grant a hand?"

I was aroused from my stupor of surprise by hearing Sam cry in a joyful tone as he clambered over the rail:

"If this isn't good fortune I never expect to have any! How does it happen that you are here, Abraham Decker?"

"First tell me why you have abandoned Abel?" the lad demanded, for by this time Seth Hartley had come aboard, and he could see that we three were alone.

"We haven't abandoned him; but to tell why we have come without him would be too long a story until after you have made explanations," Sam replied, and from his tone one would have said that because of this unexpected meeting with Abraham all his anxieties had been rolled away.

"My yarn is quickly spun. I went to Peter Snyder's hut only to find it deserted. I reckon some of these miserable Tories hereabout have denounced the harmless old man as a Whig whom it would be dangerous to leave at liberty, an' he has been carried off to prison, as was Abel Grant," Abraham said bitterly. "Therefore it was I came here, thinkin' to make a try at runnin' the sloop alone, for I couldn't hope to reach New York by way of the ferry."

"An' have you got that whelp with you?" I cried, now having my wits about me.

"Ay, that I have. Do you forget that I

promised he should not give me the slip save at the expense of his life?" and Abe pushed the hatch open yet further that we might have a view of the cuddy interior.

Looking down, I could see Luther Stedman, securely lashed in one of the bunks, and with the gag yet in his mouth, whereupon I asked, believing Abraham had shown himself unnecessarily cruel:

"Have you kept his jaws open in that fashion all this while?"

"Not a bit of it, for I'm not minded he shall go out of this world too quickly," Abe replied with a laugh. "On hearin' you plungin' through the bushes, I naturally believed an enemy was near at hand, an' therefore took good care that it should not be within his power to give an alarm. Now tell me why you are here, an' if Abel Grant's rescue has been abandoned?"

"Come ashore," Seth Hartley said, motioning with his thumb toward the cuddy that Abe might know we could not safely tell our story where Luther Stedman would hear it.

In a twinkling the four of us were ashore again, so far from the sloop that there would be no danger the Tory could play the eavesdropper, and then I recounted in the fewest possible words all that has been set down here.

It would be expressing it but feebly to say that Abraham was overjoyed. He was literally aquiver with excitement, and appeared to believe our comrade was already as good as at liberty, giving no heed whatsoever to the many chances that our plans might go awry at the cost of one or more lives.

"I thought fortune was playin' me a scurvy trick when I found old Peter's hut deserted; but now do I see that it was a piece of good luck, else would you three have all the credit of stealin' a prisoner from the enemy!" he cried exultantly, and I did not have it in my heart to show him how slender was the thread on which we had hung our hopes; but Seth Hartley said gravely:

"It yet remains to be seen if we can get the sloop out of the creek without bein' discovered by the enemy, an' as the first step toward makin' the attempt, I am goin' to do a little spyin' on my own account."

"What would you do?" I asked in surprise when he turned as if to leave us.

"We must get some idea as to where the English ships are lyin', an' that can only be done in the daylight. I count on followin' down the creek until it be possible to get a view of the fleet."

"Let me go with you?" I said, for even as he announced his purpose my mind was filled with forebodings lest he come to grief at the very moment when his services were most needed.

"There is no good reason why two should go, since one may the better get through unseen if, peradventure, there be enemies close at hand; besides, it is necessary you should rest after the long tramp."

"I am no more weary than you, an' know the lay of the land better," I replied, but yet the possibility of stretching myself out at full length in one of the bunks was most enticing.

"Stay where you are," Seth replied curtly, and then he hurried away as if afraid to prolong the conversation lest I finally carry my point.

I watched the brave fellow until he was lost to view amid the foliage, and then said to Abraham:

"If we are careful not to speak of our plans regardin' Abel Grant so that the Tory may hear, I see no reason why we should not go aboard, for we can do Seth no good by remainin' here on the shore. I'm hankerin' after some of the sloop's stores, to say nothin' of getting' the chance to lie down on a dry bed."

Abe made reply by leading the way over the Swiftsure's rail, and when we were on the deck heading for the cuddy, Sam checked us by asking:

"How has the Tory behaved? Did he make any show of tryin' to give you the slip?"

"He was too wise for that, an' must have been dull had he failed to understand that I would carry out the threat I made before settin' off from Gravesend. Besides, he's too nearly a cur to dare make a move in his own behalf when the odds are against him. A more thoroughly frightened scoundrel I have never seen. He has obeyed every order given, an' been as meek as any lamb. Wait a bit till I take the gag out of his mouth, for I haven't got the stomach to keep him in agony longer than is necessary."

"Is your heart growin' soft toward him?" Sam asked scornfully, and Abe replied with a laugh:

"Not a bit of it. I'm as eager as ever to see him punished for what has been done; but while he's in such a funk of fright, it seems much like whippin' a rabbit, to bear down very hard on him," and as he spoke the lad went into the cuddy, where we could hear him say to the prisoner:

"Remember that at the lightest squeak from you

I shall carry out the threat made when you an' I were here alone!"

Then we could hear Luther reply indistinctly, as if it was difficult to speak after his jaws had been stiffened by the gag:

"You know very well that I'll do just what you tell me! You won't let the other fellows handle me roughly, for I'm tryin' not to give you any trouble?"

This whining gave me a sensation as of nausea, and I turned away in a rage. The idea of such as he doing whatsoever he could to bring us to a prison, so long as all the odds were in his favor, and then fawning like a sick kitten when we had the upper hand! I can see something to admire in an enemy who stands up manfully, however many the chances against him; but when man or lad shows the white feather, I've nothing but the veriest contempt for him. Perhaps this comes from the fact of my having felt timorous so many times when everything looked dark; but I can say in all truth that however much of cowardice may have been in my heart, no one ever could say that he saw any signs of it.

When Abraham came on deck after having taken the gag from Luther's mouth, Sam said, as if a happy thought had just come to him:

"If yonder Tory is in such a funk, now would be a good time to find out how it was he escaped from prison. That has been in my mind ever since the attack on the sloop at the ferry stairs, an' I'd give much to have the mystery cleared."

"I've got the story already," Abe replied as a frown overspread his face. "The Tory an' I have had little else to do than clear up such mysteries as

that in which he was concerned, an' among the first questions I put to him was regardin' his escape."

"An' he told you?" I asked eagerly.

"He is much too frightened an' cowardly to do other than I demanded. That cur would betray his warmest friend, if by so doin' he might benefit himself."

"How did he get free?" Sam cried impatiently.

"It isn't a very pleasant story to hear," Abraham said gravely, and by the expression on his face I understood that we were to learn of some treachery. "It seems that Master Dyker, Jethro's father, he whom we have ever believed a good friend to the Cause, was the one who worked the trick, an' since he did so it is proof that he has been playin' us false all this while."

Next to my own father, Master Dyker was the one whom I believed true to the Cause, and the fact that he had shown himself to be a traitor was well calculated to make a fellow distrustful of every one around. It seemed so incredible that, after I was somewhat recovered from the stupefaction which came upon me with the information, I asked Abraham if he was convinced the truth had been told, or if Luther Stedman might not be lying for some secret purpose.

"There can be no question about it," the lad said sorrowfully. "I have questioned the Tory so sharply that if he had been lyin' I must have tripped him up. Since the night when we were attacked by the gang that acted under his orders, I have been askin' myself how it was they got hold of a sufficient number of boats in which to cross from New York to Brooklyn, when every craft had been

secured for use of the army, an' he has explained that Master Dyker outfitted the party. I have even seen the receipt for money paid by Luther on that date."

It was information which would sadden every friend of the Cause, and I asked myself who among our acquaintances could be trusted when such as Master Dyker had proved false.

We were yet silent and thoughtful, sadly turning over in our minds that which Abraham had said, when Seth Hartley returned, and I fancied there was an expression of satisfaction on his face.

"I believe we can get out of here, when the time comes, with but little trouble," he said as he came over the rail. "The English fleet have gone further up the harbor, an' I question if we shall run across a single ship between here an' where the Good Hope is anchored."

"Then why shouldn't we begin to warp out of the creek at once?" Sam asked eagerly. "It might make the biggest kind of a difference in case we could start at sunset, an' if we don't begin to move the sloop now, we won't be on our course till near to midnight."

I looked for Abe to make reply, believing he would take sides with Sam in the matter; but much to my surprise he said, before it was possible for any one else to speak:

"We can't afford to take any chances, an' there's no knowin' who might see us if we worked down to the mouth of the creek. With so much at stake we must exercise every caution, an', as I look at the matter, we'd best stay where we are until night has come."

"In that you are right," Seth Hartley added em-

phatically. "We shall have no trouble in workin' down between midnight an' daylight, however light the wind. Perhaps it may be well if we don't succeed in gettin' there to-night, since the venture is not to be made until another day has passed."

"You fellows who have been travelin' so far had best turn in an' get what rest you can so's to be ready for a long spell of wakefulness," Abraham interrupted. "I've been spendin' the greater portion of my time in slumber, an' will stand watch."

This proposition was much to my liking, for I understood that by getting into the best possible bodily condition we would be the same as making preparations for the task before us, and I went below without further parley.

In order that we might get all the comfort to be had on the sloop, Abraham dragged his prisoner out on the floor, that one of us might have the use of his berth, and within half an hour we who had just come up from Gravesend were sleeping soundly, and, perhaps, noisily.

When Abe awakened us it yet lacked half an hour or more of sunset; but he had already prepared a supper that seemed, after our short commons of flinty biscuit, like a real feast, and explained that he believed we ought to have time to eat leisurely so we might put a substantial lining to our stomachs.

"I allow we can afford to make a move within an hour after sunset," he said, putting the food before us; "but we're not to have matters as easy as when we came down from New York. There isn't a cloud in the sky; it will be very light, an' we can't hope to run past any craft unseen.

Luckily the wind holds fairly strong, an' I'm allowin' it'll be a bit fresher when the sun goes down. Have you fellows decided on where we shall stay till to-morrow night?"

I waited to give Seth or Sam a chance to speak, but since they held their peace, I said, having given the matter due thought:

"It strikes me we couldn't do better than to run down the Jersey coast, strikin' straight across on leavin' the creek. There would be no great harm done if we kept on to Great Kills, where we shall find a good harbor, with no fear the Britishers will come that way, or, if it seems wiser to you, we can put out to sea."

Abraham was in favor of the first proposition, and thus we settled the matter in short order.

We loitered over the meal in order to occupy as much time as possible, but it was yet light when we went on deck and examined every rope and bolt to make certain all was as it should be, although the Swiftsure had been tried out in good shape during the run down from New York.

Not until night had fully come did we make the first move toward warping out of the creek, and then went to work in good earnest, taking every care to keep within the lines of shadow as much as possible.

Seth Hartley and Abraham, in the skiff, pulled her stern around the sharpest bends, while Sam and I poled her along the reaches, and I allowed it was near to nine o'clock in the evening when she was in open water where the canvas could be spread.

The wind had not lessened in force, and was just about strong enough to suit the little sloop, for

in too heavy weather she was prone to bury her nose to such an extent as to check her headway, and Abraham said to me as he came over the rail, leaving to Seth the duty of making the skiff fast astern:

"We couldn't ask for a better night, save in the matter of light. So far as bein' hidden from view of any craft we may come upon, it might as well be broad day. If only the clouds had gathered!"

"When we left Gravesend the chances of our bein' able to get as far along in the scheme as this were so slim, that I'm not disposed to find fault now," I said laughingly, and it seems strange to me even now that I, who had been so doubtful of success a few hours previous, should have felt light-hearted when we were setting out on a cruise where danger lurked on every hand.

"If you'll take the helm I'll keep lookout forward," the lad replied, gloomily, as I thought, and in a twinkling we had all the canvas spread, the little craft having a bone in her teeth almost immediately afterward, for she was ever quick at starting.

As had been agreed upon, we headed straight across for the Jersey shore, and I dare venture to say that every pair of eyes on deck were strained to catch the first view of a possible enemy as soon as we had come out from the shelter of the land.

Save for the twinkling lights well up in the inner harbor, we saw no sign of any craft until having got well out into the bay, and then my heart came into my mouth when a small brig appeared, as if she had leaped up out of the water. That she had been well down on the other shore I understood at once, and her seemingly sudden ap-

pearance was due to the fact that she had hauled around, thus presenting her broadside, but I was none the less startled and alarmed.

"Can she be one of the Britishers?" I asked in a whisper of Seth, believing she was much too small for a war vessel, and he replied softly:

"There are three such craft in the fleet; small brigs carryin' from four to six guns, an' intended to do guard duty at a time like this when there's a big stretch of water to be patrolled."

"It looks much as if she had come around to have a look at us," I suggested, putting no faith in my own statement, and therefore I started again when he said promptly:

"That's exactly what she's about, lad, an' we shall be called upon to heave to for a visit, or get a fair idea of how skillful her gunners may be."

"We might as well surrender at once, as to let them come aboard, for with a prisoner in the cuddy, an' a British marine on deck, we can't stand very close inspection," I said, striving to hold my voice steady.

"Are you willin' to take the chances of tryin' to show your heels?" he asked almost in a whisper, as if my reply might be of the greatest importance to him, and Abraham, who had come aft to report the brig, replied sharply:

"Of course we are! There's nothin' else to be done. I'd rather take the chances of bein' sent to the bottom than give over the plan to help Abel Grant. It would be death for him, if we were overhauled now, an' so it would be for you, Seth Hartley," he added as he suddenly came to realize what discovery would cost our marine.

"Ay, lad; but that isn't to be reckoned against your safety —"

"Our safety!" Abe cried, his voice sounding loud and shrill on the night air. "What safety is to be found in a British prison? I'd rather go to the bottom with the sloop, than aboard the Good Hope as prisoner! Besides, to heave to now would insure the freein' of Luther Stedman, an' that shan't come about while I've got breath enough left to protest."

"What do you say, Sam?" I asked, minded that each member of our little party should have a voice in the matter.

"I believe as does Abe; we'll go through accordin' to the agreement made with Barney Nelson, or lose our lives in the tryin'. Besides," he added in a hopeful tone, "I'm not so certain but that the sloop can do a little more than stand her own with yonder Britisher while the wind holds as now."

As he spoke I hauled the Swiftsure a trifle more to the southward, so that the brig would have to change her course in order to come within musket-shot of us, reckoning at the time that our swinging around would not be noticed by the enemy; but I soon had good reason to know that we were being watched very closely.

The brig's bow came around to meet the change in our course, and if the two craft continued on without change of helm, they would come together midway between the two shores.

"They've got their eyes on us mighty sharp," Abe said grimly as he noted the movements of the brig. "We may as well be killed for a sheep as

a lamb, so why not head due south, an' take the chances? That's what you'll have to do precious soon if we count on leadin' 'em a chase."

I acted upon the suggestion at once, and now with the wind abeam, and the sheets hauled sharp in, our little craft was at her best. If we could not show the brig our heels on this stretch, it never could be done.

The Britishers were attending to their business sharply enough to please the veriest grumbler, for within twenty seconds after I had hauled around we saw the flash of a gun, and a solid shot skipped across our bow no more than fifty yards away.

"That means they're bent on havin' a closer look at us," Abe said with never a tremor of the voice, and I would have given everything I owned to have been able to appear as unconcerned as he. It is not to be supposed I was showing myself a coward, for I afterward came to know from what my comrades said that they believed my heart was as stout as the bravest; but I myself knew that my mouth suddenly became parched, my heart forced itself into my throat at seeming risk of choking me, while my hands would have trembled but for the grip I had on the spokes of the wheel.

"Trim ship a bit, an' lay low," Seth Hartley said suddenly. "The sloop will do better if we get our stations an' keep 'em. There's no need of a lookout now, an' I'm thinkin' two of us had best go amidships."

The benefit of the change of position on our part could be seen immediately the lads got settled down; but at that moment I did not have time to note it critically, for the brig let fly another

shot, and when I heard the missile whistling above my head it seemed as if it came within a few inches of striking us.

"The oftener she fires the better will be our chances of givin' them the slip," Abe said as he raised his head to look at the enemy. "I'm ready to take your place at the helm, Eph, if you'll feel any more safe lyin' here."

Even though I had known to a certainty that the next shot would hit me, I would not have exchanged places with him, for even though my heart was thumping loudly because of fear, my comrades should never know that being under fire disturbed me in the slightest, and I replied, calling up the most cheery tone at my command:

"I'll stay where I am, lad, till you an' the others insist that you can hold the course better than I'm doin'. As for safety, I reckon there's precious little choice of stations."

"Your upper lip is stiff," Abe said approvingly, and I smiled ever so slightly because he was thus deceived.

The Britishers were not afraid of burning powder, for within the next half-minute another solid shot came hurtling across the water; but this time the gunner was wild — we neither saw nor heard it.

In order to keep her guns bearing on us, the brig had been forced to haul around on a course parallel with ours, and thus we understood that it was her purpose to sink us offhand, rather than spend time in chase.

"You are gainin' on her a bit!" Seth Hartley cried, evidently thinking I needed heartening. "If

her gunners will slip up on their aim with the next dozen shots, we're like to come off scott free."

He had no more than spoken when we saw another flash, and a second later the gallant little sloop heeled as if she had struck a reef, while the white splinters flew in a shower from her bow.

I believed she was wounded to the death, and can well fancy that there was a note of sadness in my voice as I cried sharply:

"Get forward there an' see what mischief has been done. Sam, you'd best stand by the skiff in case we need it suddenly!"

Seth and Abraham obeyed the command even as I spoke, and at the same instant a wail of fear came up from the cuddy:

"Don't leave me here to be killed! Don't leave me. I'll do whatsoever you say if you won't leave me!"

"Don't fret yourself about that," Sam shouted much as if matters were moving exactly to his taste. "We're not minded to lose you again, Luther; but if your very particular friends send their old iron around so carelessly, there's a good show of our bein' together for all time to come."

"There's nothin' wrong here!" Abe cried from the bow, and it seemed as if only then did I begin to breathe. "We've lost the bitts, and some of the bow rail; but nothin' to count!"

Another shot on the heels of the one that had come so near the target; but it buried itself in the water fifty feet astern, and Seth Hartley shouted as if he no longer had any fear as to the final result:

"Keep her to the course, lad. The Englishmen

are growin' nervous, an' we need only hold out five minutes longer to be beyond range, for we're gainin' hand over hand."

The matter of keeping her to the course did not worry me; but I questioned whether the little craft would hold together five minutes longer. It needed only that one shot should strike us fairly to put an end to the chase in short order, and it seemed to me absolutely impossible the gunners could send half a dozen more without hitting the mark.

I had not allowed myself to look at the enemy, but kept my eyes on the course that we might not lose a single inch; yet when Seth Hartley insisted that we were gaining I could not resist the temptation to glance over my shoulder, and that which I saw put new heart into me.

If the brig had been holding her own she should have been directly abreast of us, whereas, short though the time had been, her jib-boom was no more than on even terms with our stern. As I gazed she yawned again to fire another shot, and then I could see why we were showing our heels so handily, for she must have lost a good ten yards in order to send after us a missile that flew even wider than the others.

"Don't leave me, lads! For Heaven's sake, don't leave me tied up in this fashion so that I can't move so much as a finger!" came from the cuddy, and it was not needed one should look down at the prisoner in order to know that he was half dead with fear.

"Don't fret yourself about our leavin' anythin' like you!" Sam cried. "We'll take precious good care of your body, Luther Stedman, till we can put

it in the custody of those who don't change their coats with every turn of the tide; but we feel it our solemn duty to run away from your red-coated friends yonder in order to save ourselves from bein' shocked by such woeful waste of powder an' ball."

"Don't crow, Sam," I said earnestly. "We're not out of the woods yet, an' the next shot may send us to the bottom!"

"They'll have to get new spectacles for their gunners before anythin' like that can happen," the lad cried joyously as a shot passed high over our heads. "This little craft has run around the whole fleet, an' it'll be odd if she can't get the best of a measly brig like that yonder!"

I hope I shan't be accused of drawing the long bow when I say that the enemy sent no less than ten more missiles at us, and never once came near enough to make a fellow wink; but such is the truth, as can be testified to by more than one. The brig continued to fire as long as we were within range; but owing to the distance she lost in so doing, we were soon so far ahead that the shot struck astern, and in half an hour from the time we were first under fire the little Swiftsure was sending the spray over her bow as if she enjoyed the wetting, while the lumbering brig was no more than a dark smudge in our wake.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A STRONG SWIMMER.

THAT we had come out of the muddle in a marvelously fortunate manner, goes without saying, and I question if there is another craft of the Swiftsure's size that has run away from a full-rigged brig in such a short space of time. It was something to crow over, for we lads had built the gallant little sloop from keel to mast-head, with never a person to aid or advise, and had good right to feel proud at walking away from the Britisher at such a pace.

It would be a brave story to tell, and we had the right after taking all the risks, to dwell over it as we pleased; but when I look back at the matter now it does not seem such a wonderful performance. I am not inclined to belittle that which was done by our sloop, yet I can now see the Britisher was at a disadvantage.

The wind was a fairly strong one for a craft of the Swiftsure's size, and only half as heavy as the brig needed, consequently our sloop was able to do her very best, while the Britisher was gasping for breath, so to speak. In addition to this handicap, she was forced to lose way every time a gun was discharged, while we kept straight on without let or hindrance, taking the chances of being sent to the bottom.

However, give the Britisher all the allowance possible, and it was something of which we might be excused for feeling proud, and it can well be fancied that we did not spare our praises for the little sloop. Twice had she served us a mighty good turn, and it is not to be wondered at that we felt the warmest admiration for her.

In the excitement of the chase, when the heavy shots were being sent our way, we had given no heed to the prison ship, although we must have passed within full view of her riding lights. However, it was not needed that we have another look at her, for we knew right well where to find the craft when the time had come for Abel Grant to make his desperate attempt at escape.

The important question for us to decide was whether we should make for the Jersey shore as had been agreed upon, or if it was wiser that we put to sea, running the risk of being able to get back on time, and I looked at Seth Hartley, as if asking him to settle the matter.

"My advice is," he said, reading the question in my eyes, "to put to sea for a time. If the wind shows signs of flattenin' out we should be able, 'twixt now an' to-morrow night, to work back to Coney Island, an' it is much the same as a fact that the brig will make search for us before mornin', even if she isn't followin' our wake this very minute."

I turned to my comrades to see what they thought of this advice, and both appeared to think there was no further need of words, therefore I held the bow of the sloop due south, but gave the word to slacken away the sheets, for we were not eager to make overly much distance.

When we had settled down to an outside cruise, and nothing could be seen to cause alarm, Abraham went down to have a look at the prisoner, and I heard him say with much of scorn in his tone:

"You are the lad who dared to make an attack on this craft when you had fifteen or twenty dissolute fellows to do your bidding; but you haven't got the courage to lay here when a shot or two skims over the sloop! I can have some little regard for a brave enemy; but take the combination of coward an Tory, an' it makes mean stuff."

"You wouldn't like to be tied up here in this fashion while the sloop was bein' shot into fragments!" Luther whined.

"Were you in any more danger than either of us? You should have been proud because your particular friends had their eyes wide open enough to see us while we were slippin' down the harbor, though I'm allowin' there isn't very much chance for pride in their marksmanship."

"I wouldn't have been frightened if I hadn't been trussed up in this fashion, for if the sloop had been swamped, as seemed likely when the shots were comin' so thickly, I couldn't raise a finger to save myself."

"I didn't count that you should be able to do anythin' of the kind. If your friends had sunk us, it was time for you to go to the bottom, since we're not countin' that you'll ever have the chance to work us more injury."

"Do you count on murderin' me?" Luther cried with a wail of agony, and Abraham replied with a laugh:

"Not a bit of it, because you're so worthless that I couldn't afford to remember I'd had a hand in

puttin' you out of the way. But I don't count on givin' you a chance to escape, and whenever your friends press us too hard, you'll be stowed where whatever of harm comes will strike you first. Just now, seein' that you can't do us a mischief, I'm goin' to give you a chance to move about a bit."

From the sounds which followed I fancied that Abe was unloosening the Tory's bonds, therefore was not surprised when the cur poked his head out of the cuddy hatch, most like in order to get an idea of where we were.

"It's not a pleasant thing to have before one's eyes," I said when Abe came on deck again; "but I reckon it was no more than right he should have a chance to get the cramps out of his limbs."

"He can't do any harm now that we're so far at sea, an' because he's like to have a long spell of layin' in harness when we work inland again, it seems no more than decent to ease up on him a little, though I'm willin' to admit we haven't any call to show mercy after all he has done, an' tried to do, to us. When Abel Grant comes aboard, as please God he may before another night has worn away, it shall be for him to say what we'll do with the sneak."

Luther Stedman heard these words, and he shrank back out of sight as if having received a blow, as well he might, for it was wholly due to him that our comrade had been made a prisoner, and it was not likely that, having just come from quarters on the Good Hope, Abel would be inclined to mercy while passing sentence on the Tory cur who had worked him so much harm.

It was not pleasing to see the Tory moving about in the cuddy as if he was a member of our com-

pany; but better that than inflict torture, and we pulled the hatch over the companion-way to shut him out from view.

When we had run five or six miles from the land, I proposed that we heave to, rather than take the chances of going so far away that we might not be able to get back on time, and from then until nearly sunrise it was only a question of making ourselves as comfortable as possible.

We lounged around on deck, for the air was not overly chilly, spinning yarns or speculating as to whether General Washington would make a stand in New York when the British were ready to attack; but never once did we speak of the work on hand. As for my own part, I did not dare to start the conversation on that subject lest with discussion of the chances against us I might grow faint-hearted. At a later day, Abraham confessed that he held his peace concerning the rescue because he already knew of too many reasons why we might fail, and feared some one would suggest a danger such as had not yet come to his mind.

When the conversation lagged one or another would get "forty winks" of sleep, or have out of the stores sufficient to provide him with a meal that was not needed; but when the first gray streaks of the coming day appeared in the eastern sky all hands were on the alert, and divided in opinion as to whether it would be safest to make harbor back of Coney Island, or off the Jersey shore.

I was in favor of the latter anchorage, as was Seth Hartley, and after a few moments of tongue-wagging all agreed that this plan should be carried out. Therefore it was that in the dim light of the morning, with the wind still holding fairly

strong, we stood across to Great Kills, seeing neither ship nor skiff on the waters.

Now in order to reach a point as near the prison ship as it would be safe to venture, we would be forced to row many miles in the skiff, unless we used the sloop during a portion of the journey, and when we were come to anchor inside the sand-spit where was little chance of being seen by any craft that came into or went out of the harbor, I made the following proposition:

"If at sunset the wind holds as now, I'm of the mind that we can do no better than stand across a full two-thirds of the distance from here to Gravesend. Then whosoever is to handle the skiff can put off in her, while the sloop cruises to an' fro, as near the Good Hope as is safe, to the end that if Abel Grant's escape is discovered before he is well clear of the ship, we may make a rush with this same craft that has twice shown her heels to the Britishers."

"Suppose we agree upon that plan, who is to go in the skiff?" Abe asked jealously, and I knew he was fearing lest he miss being given the most dangerous post.

"It is to my mind that Seth Hartley should be one to go in the skiff, since he can tell very much of what is bein' done on the ship, while either of us would be all at sea on such matters," I said, firmly determined to carry this point even though it might be necessary to exercise my authority as leader of the Minute Boys.

"I can well see why that should be done," Abe said emphatically, "an' am agreed, if Seth is willin' to take the chances knowin' that in event of bein'

captured he'd be hung without much ceremony," and the lad looked inquiringly toward our marine, who replied quietly:

"I shall be in no more danger aboard the skiff, than when we were hidin' in the swamp, an' if I had not been willin' to take any an' every chance, I should not be with you now."

"If all Britishers were like you, Seth, how quickly this so-called rebellion would come to an end!" Sam said admiringly, and Abe asked impatiently:

"Who is to go with Seth, that's what I want to know? It seems as if, since I was willin' to set off with Luther Stedman, leavin' to you fellows all the chances that might come to finish the job without me, I should be given an opportunity to show myself."

"You must be a glutton for danger if the night tramp across the island, when you were hampered by a prisoner, was not enough," Sam cried laughingly. "So far I haven't had a chance to do very much, but it is known full well that I can pull a good stroke at the oars, an' it seems as if you an' Eph might give way for me."

I had not spoken, though I was aching to have a hand in the adventure despite all the dangers which caused the cold chills to run down my back, and Seth must have understood somewhat of this, for he said after Sam had made his plea:

"It strikes me that the only fair way would be to make the decision by lot. Each of you is eager to have a hand in the matter, an' well it should be so, since it shows you to be lads of mettle; but the claim of one is no greater than that of the others."

"Very well, we'll settle it that way!" Abraham cried, and I knew he was praying that he might win what was like to be the prize of death. "You shall make ready the lots, an' we'll abide by the decision."

Seth went into the cuddy where was Luther, still at liberty, only long enough to get three bits of ratline stuff, which he held in his closed hand as he said:

"One of these is much shorter than the others, an' he who draws it shall be entitled to go with me in the skiff."

Sam made his selection hurriedly, eagerly; Abraham came next, and when I took the remaining lot it was to find that mine was the shortest. It was a great piece of luck, and I knew full well that both the other lads envied me.

"Now that the matter is decided, I hope you two who are to handle the sloop will be cautious," I said, speaking as I believed a leader had the right. "Do not come within sight of the prison ship unless we have been discovered, an' you feel certain it will be possible to lend us a hand. In case you see that we cannot escape, if chase be made, think only of securin' your own safety, leavin' us to our fate, for it is better that two of us pay the penalty than that all be captured an' our Tory set free."

"If you think there is fear that I may not be sufficiently cautious, change places with me, an' then you'll know to a certainty that the sloop will be handled with due regard to the safety of those on board," Abe cried eagerly, and for the moment I verily believe he thought it might be possible to work his will by using such an argument.

"We'd best hold to the agreement that was made by drawin' lots," I said with a smile which did not

tend to sooth the lad. "It was only in my mind that if it seemed impossible Seth an' I could come out of the venture alive, then your duty would be to look after the safety of those who had a show of goin' free."

"Suppose you was runnin' the sloop, an' I had gone in the skiff with Seth," Abraham cried irritably. "If you saw a boat-load of Britishers overhaulin' us, would you turn tail an' run away?"

I could not well answer the question without going back on my own advice, therefore held my peace, and Seth Hartley put an end to the conversation by saying with a smile:

"I'm thinkin' you lads, now that the details have been arranged, had better set about makin' preparations for the night's work, instead of rufflin' each other. Even if matters go exactly as we could wish, there's a deal of hard work to be done, an' he who gets the most rest 'twixt now an' sunset will be in the best shape for it. How about standin' hourly watches, one at a time, all the others to make every effort at goin' to sleep?"

I question if either of us felt any inclination to turn in just then; but all understood that Seth had spoken wisely, and we made a downright task of sleeping, I taking the first trick.

Luther was allowed to remain at liberty, with the understanding that he was not to come on deck, and I had little to do save think of what the night might have in store for us. Seaward not so much as the wing of a gull was in sight, and as far as could be seen along the sandy shore it was as if the land had never been inhabited.

My eyes were really heavy with slumber when I aroused Seth, after an hour or more had passed,

and, lying at full length on the cuddy floor, I slept without being disturbed when the watches were changed, throughout nearly the whole of that day.

The sun was no more than an hour high in the heavens when I awakened because of having had my fill of sleep, and found Seth and Abe both in the cockpit.

"Have you two been standin' more than your share of the watches?" I asked sharply, and was soon made to know that Seth had but just come out of the cuddy, while Abe, like myself, was surfeited with slumber.

Five minutes later Sam awakened of his own accord, and we four sat in the cockpit silent and motionless, awaiting the coming of night. It was not a time for conversation, and yet so great was the suspense that to think of what remained to be done was almost painful.

We made ready the canvas for hoisting; examined the oars in the skiff critically, for a defect in one might cost the lives of all, and, at Seth's suggestion, wound the row-locks with rope that we might be able to pull the more silently. The wind held steady, with promise of freshening after sunset, for already were fleecy clouds coming up out of the west, not in sufficient force to shut out the light of the stars, but yet enough to tell that the little Swiftsure would have a fair chance to show what she was able to do in the way of sailing.

"So far everythin' is in our favor, an' if Barney Nelson has been able to do his share, we should succeed," Seth said as he hove the anchor short by way of finding some work for his hands.

We had cleared the deck of everything movable that might not be needed, and otherwise done all

in our power to guard against accidents. When the sun set Abraham went down and made his prisoner fast in the bunk again, not heeding Luther's pleading or promises, and as the last rays of golden light faded away in the west, we got under way, although there was no real need of our leaving the anchorage for two hours more.

We stood well down off Coney Island in order to pass the time, and when it seemed as if it was near nine o'clock we turned the sloop's bow up the bay, thus really beginning the venture.

The little Swiftsure made good time, but glided over the water as silently as a shadow, as if understanding the necessity for caution, until we were come off the lights of the prison ship, perhaps three miles away due east.

"I allow this is our spot, lad," Seth Hartley said in a whisper, for so strongly were we imbued with the idea that absolute silence was essential to the success of the venture, that we had hardly taken a long breath since heading on a northerly course.

Abraham, who was standing nearby, took the helm, and, throwing aside my boots, coat, hat and vest in order to be prepared for swimming if anything of the kind became necessary, I dropped into the skiff which Sam was holding alongside, the sloop's headway having been checked.

Without a word of farewell, or even a whisper to each other, we settled down to the oars, pulling steadily but cautiously, and thus made our way across the bay until it was possible to see the riding lights of the Good Hope quite distinctly.

"Here's where we'd best wait," Seth said, speaking for the first time since we left the sloop, and at the same moment shipping his oars.

It was in my mind that we might safely venture a full half-mile nearer; but he was the one who should know best, and I held my peace.

In the night, however much light may be given by the stars, it is difficult to judge of distances on the water; but it seemed to me as if we were not less than a mile and a half from the Good Hope, and while we were so far away it would not be possible to lend Abel Grant any aid if he was discovered at the moment of letting himself over the ship's side.

By gestures I made Seth Hartley understand that in my opinion we should pull up nearer the Good Hope; but he shook his head so decidedly that I made no further attempt at persuading him, though I said to myself that if Abel Grant came to grief after getting into the water, our marine could be held responsible.

I had thought the time of suspense while we were on the sloop as painful as anything well could be; but it was veriest peace and content as compared with this straining one's eyes to see and ears to hear, without avail. We were too far away to make out what might be going on aboard; but must sit there watching the twinkling lights and listening to the lip-lip-lipping of the water against the side of the skiff, powerless to aid even in the slightest degree the poor fellow whom we believed was about to make an effort at escaping.

Moment after moment passed without change, and I became so wrought up that it was actually necessary to shut my teeth on the handle of the oar, otherwise I would have cried aloud from sheer nervousness.

Seth remained motionless as a statue, save when

the swinging of the skiff forced him to turn on the thwart that he might keep his eyes fixed upon the ship, and after it seemed absolutely impossible for me to longer restrain my impatience, I asked in a soft whisper:

"How late is it?"

"An hour or more past midnight," he replied without turning his head, and my heart sank within me.

"Then he has failed!" I said in despair.

"It may be Barney could not make the necessary arrangements, an' the attempt has been put off."

"Then why should we remain here longer?"

"Because we do not know what may have been done," he replied, just a bit curtly as I fancied, and once more we resumed our listening and watching, but now hope was dead in my heart, and I played my part listlessly, thinking only that we were trifling with our own lives by remaining so near the enemy.

When perhaps half an hour more had passed without bringing any token from the man whom we had hoped to save, I saw the canvas of the Swiftsure, ghost-like amid the gloom, and knew that Abraham and Sam had come to make certain we were safe. Touching Seth Hartley on the shoulder, I pointed out the sail to him, but he shook his head impatiently, and turned again to fasten his gaze on the prison ship.

Now the strain upon my nerves was lessened in some slight degree, since I could occupy myself with the movements of the sloop. I saw her stand off and on, keeping at the same distance, however, and thus knew that the lads, having made out the skiff, were assured as to our whereabouts.

Then, when I had said to myself that we were playing the simple by remaining there longer, the skiff was rocked violently to and fro as if some monster of the deep had struck her, and only by the utmost effort did I prevent myself from shrieking in terror as a small black object appeared above the gunwale within a few inches of where I was sitting.

Seth Hartley bent forward to grasp the strange object, and I was literally stricken dumb with astonishment when Abel Grant's face, the hair hanging over it in snake-like wisps, was before me.

Neither he nor Seth spoke, but our marine, guiding him to the stern of the skiff, set about assisting the poor fellow inboard, while I moved here or there as was necessary to prevent the light craft from oversetting.

When this had been done Seth touched my lips with his wet fingers in token that I was to hold my peace, and then took up the oars, swinging the skiff around until she was headed for the ghostly sail in the distance.

I never shall be able to tell how fervent was the hymn of thanksgiving in my heart, or how nearly overpowering the astonishment that Abel had come upon us thus unseen, and as a means of letting off some of the excitement and triumph I pulled at the oars as never before, sending the skiff ahead with a gurgling of water under the bow that sounded like sweetest music.

Abraham and Sam saw when we turned the craft, and bore down upon us supposing we had tired of the vigil, with never a suspicion that the work had been accomplished successfully, while Abel Grant sat in the stern sheets swaying his body to and fro to

mark the time for our stroke, as if he had just come aboard after a season of pleasuring.

We were alongside the sloop and made fast before Abraham realized that we in the skiff numbered three, and then he cried:

"Where did —"

"Not a whisper!" Seth Hartley said hoarsely, and instantly he clambered over the rail the helm was in his keeping, the sloop being headed due south.

Not until we were fully two miles away was a word spoken, though Abel Grant continued to shake each of us by the hand with a grip which would have been painful but for our intense joy, and then Seth said, speaking cautiously even though we were so far away:

"Now I'm thinkin' Abel Grant had better tell his story, for I'm achin' to know how he could have come upon the skiff so secretly while I was keepin' watch as I never did before."

"Go ahead, Abel!" I added, "for until I hear your voice I shan't feel really certain that you are here, even though my arm is lame through your efforts to wring my hand from it."

"I reckon you can figger it all out, needin' no words of mine," our "admiral" said with a low laugh of satisfaction. "Barin' our marine here, that Barney Nelson is the most decent Britisher I ever came across. He laid out the plan' an' asked if I was willin' to try it. Willin'? I'd have agreed if the water of the sea had been boilin' hot, for anythin' was better than the stayin' there, with that whelp of a Luther Stedman crowin' over me —"

"Luther Stedman is in the cuddy tied hand an'

foot, so after tellin' your story you can go below an' crow over him," Sam cried in glee.

"That Tory on board this craft?" Abel asked, and would have showered us with questions but that I said sharply:

"Tell your story first, admiral, an' then you shall hear all about the Tory."

"Wa'al, as I've said, when that Britisher allowed he'd be willin' to give me a lift, I told him I'd agree to try anythin' he could figger out, an' so I did. Jest about midnight I was told off with twenty other poor wretches to take my turn at gettin' a breath of fresh air on deck, an' there was your Barney Nelson on guard. He'd already explained that if I saw him doin' duty I was to work around behind him, next the rail, where I'd find a rope hangin' over, an' it all went along slick as grease. I got behind the marine; found the rope, an' let myself down inter the water, expectin' to feel the ping of a British bullet every minute. Of course I didn't try to splash 'round very much, but pushed off, swimmin' like a water-logged dory."

"Did you swim from midnight till you came alongside the skiff?" I asked in surprise, and Abel replied with a gleeful laugh:

"Ay, lad, that's what I did, seein's there wasn't any dock nigh at hand for me to haul up at. I reckon I'd got well over to the Jersey shore before havin' the idee that I was out of the course, an' then I hove to for a bit. You see Nelson didn't tell me where you was likely to be, so I had to do a deal of guessin' till the sail of the sloop loomed up in the distance, an' then I knew you lads were close at hand. After that it was only a case of keepin' my arms an' legs goin', not puttin' in any very

hard licks, 'cause I was bound to save my wind seein's it might be necessary to paddle 'round quite a spell."

"You must have been swimmin' a good three hours!" Abraham exclaimed, and Abel replied with a grin:

"I reckon I was in the water that long; but I turned over on my back now an' then for a breathin' spell. It wasn't sich a very long pull for the admiral of a fleet, 'cause of course he ought'er know how to handle himself in the water, else he wouldn't be fit to take command of the Minute Boys' navy."

It would be useless for me to attempt to set down all that was said that night when, at the distance of five miles or more, we ran down the Long Island shore. It was as if each of us needed to hear himself talk, and there was no thought of anything save yarn spinning until every fellow had wagged his tongue sore.

And now, because I have taken up more time and pages than he who reads may care to spend or turn, this poor apology for a story of what we poor apologies for Minute Boys did, shall come to a speedy end, with the promise that at some day I will set down all we accomplished when our company numbered fifty-four members, for it grew apace after somewhat of our work was made known.

As may well be understod, we did not attempt to gain New York by sailing up the bay, but doubled Montauk Point as we had done once before, only to find, after an unusually long voyage, that the enemy was in possession of the colony far beyond Meyers Point, while our army appeared to be making for the Hudson river.

Then it was that we tricked the Britishers once

more by sneaking up to Frog's Point in the night, laying there close under a clump of overhanging trees till the following evening, when, with the wind blowing considerably more than half a gale and the rain coming down as if the heavens had suddenly opened, we ran up the Harlem river to King's bridge. There, by unshipping our mast, we slipped through into the Hudson river, and as far up the stream as Yonkers.

At this place we parted company with Luther Stedman, being as glad to get rid of the cur as he was to go. We left the Tory in the keeping of Colonel Clinton, who contrived to keep him in prison a good six months, after which he was set free because his value as an enemy did not warrant further bother with him. We Minute Boys failed to see the scoundrel until more than a year had passed, and then we crippled him for good, as shall be told when I write concerning what we did after our company was sufficiently large to make it of real service in the war.

And Seth Hartley? His time of enlistment expired before he had been with us four months, and then both he and Abel were regularly enrolled in our ranks.

At this moment the Swiftsure, old and worn as are her builders, lies at anchor within my range of vision, and there was never a time when we called upon her that she did not respond like some thing of flesh and blood.

THE END.